



## ***WORKING DRAFT***

# **Making Student Achievement the Focus:**

**A five-year action plan for District of Columbia Public Schools**

**As of April 2009**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Making Student Achievement the Focus: A 5-Year Action Plan for the D.C. Public Schools

The District of Columbia Public Schools boasts individual schools and classrooms with high quality programs and strong results. Despite growing pockets of excellence, however, our school system's shortcomings remain deep, widespread, and systemic; and the situation for our city's children as a whole continues to be unacceptable. In 2006-2007, less than 15% of our students met nationally recognized standards of proficiency in reading and mathematics<sup>1</sup>, placing them last in the nation. Just over half of our students graduate from high school.

Many of our students also face daunting challenges outside the classroom. While these challenges undoubtedly put added pressure on schools and must be addressed, we cannot allow them to serve as blanket excuses for failure within the classroom. With the lives of children at stake, we must - as a school system - take responsibility and work relentlessly toward dramatic gains in student achievement, despite these external challenges. We are acting to create a school system in which student achievement guides everything that we do. We have already seen the impact of an increasing focus on student achievement, with gains of 8-11 percentage point in reading and math at elementary and secondary levels between 2007 and 2008. Graduation rates are also up at our senior high schools. But we still have a long way to go, and no time to waste. Our action plan takes into account the realities of our current situation and reflects input from throughout DCPS, as well as lessons from effective school district reform efforts around the country.

This plan does not replace the Master Education Plan (MEP) developed by the previous administration of DCPS. It rather seeks to refine, define, and sequence the steps we are taking to achieve the lofty goals of the MEP—goals in which we strongly believe. The Five-Year Action Plan will also guide the development of several other key plans related to student achievement in the District of Columbia. The annual DCPS Performance Plan draws from this action plan in defining the yearly goals to which the mayor will hold DCPS accountable. Each year, we will return to the overall goals and initiatives laid out in this Action Plan, assess our current status, and define the specific objectives we will focus on for the coming year. In addition, the Master Facilities Plan, whose goal is to modernize all DCPS classrooms within the next five years, mirrors the timeline and ambition of this plan. The Master Facilities Plan has been shaped by the educational priorities of DCPS, outlined in further detail below.

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<sup>1</sup> National Assessment of Educational Progress (2006 - 2007)

In short, we are going to make student achievement a reality across the D.C. Public Schools through a plan built around:

- ¶ An ambitious vision for success of our system and those it serves.
- ¶ Six interdependent strategies that will focus our energy and resources on that vision.
- ¶ The thoughtful and disciplined implementation needed to execute those strategies.

## **AMBITIOUS VISION FOR SUCCESS**

We have two related overarching goals:

- To create the best urban school district in the country, and
- To close the achievement gap that persists along racial and socioeconomic lines.

By 2013, our schools and our system as a whole will be fundamentally different – and better – than the system was at the outset of this plan. All DCPS schools will offer engaging instruction, diverse programs, and specialty learning environments. School facilities will be safe, clean, and more modern; and the centralized operations that support schools and learning will be efficient, transparent, and responsive. DCPS will attract and retain high-performing educators, efficiently and systematically develop its people, reward performance, and not tolerate mediocrity. Curriculum, instruction, student assessment, and professional development will all be directed toward improving student achievement. An informed and empowered parent population will become a driving force for change and an integral part of our strategy for achieving excellence. Throughout the system, innovative partnerships will engage the broader community in increasing educational options for students and playing an active, cooperative role in school improvement.

All of this will translate into a dramatically different experience for students, teachers, and parents.

## **The experience of DCPS stakeholders will be dramatically different by 2013.**

### **Students will...**

- Experience a challenging, rich curriculum
- Be free of worry about “the basics” because schools will be clean, safe, and orderly
- Be fully prepared for graduation, college and work

### **Teachers will...**

- Focus on the bottom line: student achievement
- Habitually analyze student data to teach more effectively
- Engage in relevant, challenging professional development
- Value being part of a supportive and performance-driven culture that measures and generously rewards results

### **Parents will...**

- Be change agents, pushing us towards continuous improvement
- Understand their children’s academic milestones and know how to support success
- Understand how to navigate and partner with their children’s schools
- Choose DCPS as the best option for their children

## SIX INTERDEPENDENT GOALS

Six goals, working in concert, will enable us to realize our aspirations for DCPS and those we serve.

- 1. Compelling Schools – Create schools that provide a consistent foundation in academics, strong support for social and emotional needs, and a variety of challenging themes and programs.** As this administration took over the leadership of DCPS, more than half of our schools were failing to provide a year’s worth of learning in a year’s worth of student time. By 2013, we will build a diverse portfolio of high-performing schools, all offering a full complement of academic and enrichment programs and wrap-around services that meet the needs of every student and work to attract families. We will do this by enhancing the quality of our school portfolio, ensuring accountability for school performance, making schools safer and more modern, and expanding our ability to meet the needs of students with special needs.
- 2. Great People – Develop and retain the most highly effective educators in the country, and recognize and reward their work.** DCPS, high-performing employees have long been unrecognized and unrewarded, and poor performers face no real consequences. We have committed to building a system that identifies, hires, develops, and rewards the many passionate and talented people in the system, and that holds every school employee accountable for performing his or her duties competently.
- 3. Aligned Curriculum – Implement a rigorous, relevant, college preparatory curriculum that gives all students meaningful options for life.** DCPS must take seriously its responsibility to help students build the basic skills that form the foundation for productive lives, and challenge every student to achieve to his or her full potential. Going forward, we will align our curriculum, instructional materials and approach, assessments, use of data, and professional development toward clear and ambitious goals. Everyone in the system, including teachers, students, and parents, will know what those goals are and what their role is in helping us to reach them.
- 4. Data-Driven Decisions – Support decision-making with accurate information about how our students are performing and how the district as a whole is performing.** DCPS will actively use data on student performance to determine whether our students are learning and how best to help them. With stronger data systems and a new culture of using data to make decisions at the classroom, school, and district levels, we will use evidence to make decisions about how to help students learn, where to put our resources and how to manage our staff.
- 5. Effective Central Office – Provide schools with support they need to operate effectively.** Too often the central office has operated as though schools were there to serve it, rather than the other way around. The procurement process has been inefficient, costly, and confusing; budgeting procedures have been unclear and unmonitored; food service has lost money and provided low quality meals. Moving forward, the central office will deliver on its sole duty of efficiently providing schools with the services they

need to operate, and teachers and students will be able to devote their time and energy to teaching and learning – the things that truly matter.

6. **Engaged Community – Partner with families and community members who demand better schools.** We must clarify the shared responsibility of parents, students, and the community in increasing student achievement, and engage stakeholders in making our schools successful. We will do this by increasing students’ engagement in their academic success, building trust and mutual respect between DCPS and its families, equipping parents with the information to advocate for their children’s success, and pursuing partnerships with business and community organizations.

### **Interdependence of the Six Goals**

The six goals, of course, work together. Successful engagement with local partners, for example, is crucial to creating well-performing, innovative, and safe schools, which in turn are crucial to attracting and keeping good teachers. As another example, it is impossible to properly measure, recognize, and reward teachers without the systems needed to measure their contributions to student learning.

### **THOUGHTFUL AND DISCIPLINED IMPLEMENTATION**

Thoughtful and disciplined implementation is critical not only because of the plan’s complexity, scale, and admitted difficulty, but also to overcome the widespread – and potentially debilitating – cynicism created by failed reform efforts of the past.

The time to act is now, not only because we must, but also because our chances for success are higher than they have been in a long while. Our work thus far has been met with enthusiastic support throughout the District of Columbia community – local government, business and community groups, and parents. That support gives us both the momentum needed to undertake a comprehensive transformation plan and the foundation upon which to secure its success.

The DCPS 5-year action plan is a “living document” that will be revisited regularly as we learn what works and what changes we need to make. We at DCPS look forward to working with the Office of the Mayor, the D.C. Council, partners in the philanthropy and business communities, and, most important, families and students to ensure its successful implementation.

# I. Compelling Schools

In 2013, the experience of attending a DCPS school will be significantly different than it is today. Students will attend high-performing schools that build their base of academic skills, meet their different needs and interests, and challenge them to achieve to their potential. They will enroll in programs run in partnership with outstanding educational partners and with Washington's unique set of cultural organizations, government institutions, businesses and non-profits. They will sit in classrooms that are attractive, safe, and conducive to learning, and they will benefit from a range of supports that address their social and emotional needs. In sum, students will attend schools that endow them with fundamental skills, challenge them with rigorous and varied curricula, and support them towards high academic performance.

To meet these goals, we will make significant changes to our schools and their operations. We will concentrate our efforts on enriching the school portfolio by aggressively improving underperforming schools, but also by expanding the best existing programs within DCPS and adding new programs to better meet students' interests and needs. We will also focus on holding our schools to the highest performance standards; making our classrooms safe, orderly, and modern; and enhancing our efforts to reach special-education students and English Language Learners.

This section begins with a brief discussion of where we are now on each of these objectives, describes our aspirations for moving forward, and outlines a set of initiatives we will undertake to fulfill our aspirations.

## **WHERE WE STARTED: *A Snapshot as of Early 2008***

Student achievement in DCPS schools is nowhere near the potential of our children. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the reading and math skills of our fourth- and eighth-grade students are the worst of urban districts nationwide. At the high school level, only 43 percent of students who enroll as ninth-graders in DCPS schools or DC public charter schools graduate within five years; only 9 percent of that same cohort graduate from college within five years of matriculation.

At the same time, enrollment in DCPS schools is falling. We educated 13,000 fewer students in 2007 than we did in 2002. Over the same time period, enrollment in the District's charter schools grew by 9,000 students, to nearly 20,000.

The reasons why are clear. With some notable exceptions, our schools are underperforming and do not provide compelling, rigorous academic programs to students and their families. Our schools are not held sufficiently accountable for results. They are neither safe enough nor modern enough. And they do not deliver the services that they should for students with special needs.

Specific challenges include:

- ¶ Our schools are under-performing and do not provide compelling, rigorous programs to students and their families:
  - Thirty-five DCPS schools (29 percent) are currently listed in Performance Improvement 5 (PI-5) status under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. An additional 15 schools (12 percent) are in PI-4 status, in line to become PI-5 schools by the end of this year should they not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).
  - Only seven of DCPS's approximately 121 schools offer specialized city-wide programs; among them, five are in Northwest Washington and two are in Northeast Washington, making them largely inaccessible to many of the highest-need students in the District.
- ¶ Our schools are not held sufficiently accountable for results
  - No single yardstick (e.g., a school "report card") exists to measure all schools in a uniform way.
  - Parents often make enrollment decisions for their children without sound and comparable information about school performance.
- ¶ Our schools are neither safe enough nor modern enough:
  - 72 percent of schools received poor or unsatisfactory facilities ratings in 2006.
  - More than half of teenage students in DC attend schools that meet the city's definition of "persistently dangerous."
- ¶ Our schools do not reach special-education students and English Language Learners as they should:
  - About one of every five special-education students in Washington attends a private school, compared with one in 11 in Prince George's County and one in 27 in Montgomery County.
  - Because of DCPS's poor case management, the city has a backlog of over 1,400 students awaiting court-ordered closure of their special-education needs.
  - DCPS spends one-third of its budget on special education, primarily to cover the costs of students who choose to attend private and nonpublic programs and to handle lawsuits resulting from poor case management.
  - Eleven DCPS schools with significant populations of English Language Learners (ELLs) have been categorized as in need of improvement under NCLB for not meeting annual measurable achievement objectives for four consecutive years. In particular, our ELLs consistently fail to meet achievement objectives in reading comprehension, especially at the high school level.



## **WHAT WE HAVE ACCOMPLISHED: *Progress as of Early 2009***

Over the last year, we have made the following initial strides towards reversing these realities:

- ¶ Reduced the backlog of special education students awaiting court-ordered closure by over 40 percent, from 1,478 in December 2007 to less than 500 as of early 2009.
- ¶ Increased the cumulative rate of timely implementation of special education hearing officer determinations from 21 percent to nearly 50 percent.
- ¶ Opened the Youth Engagement Academy (YEA) and Phelps Architecture, Construction, and Engineering High School - both citywide programs which will ultimately serve 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade students. YEA serves students who are not succeeding in traditional school environments and would benefit from a small, alternative high school setting with added supports. Phelps represents the new standard in Career and Technical Education, where students receive both rigorous academic preparation for college and training for a specific trade.
- ¶ Kicked off the Catalyst School project to support schools in developing strong theme-based programs in STEM (science, technology, engineering, math), arts integration, and world language and culture.
- ¶ Established the D.C. Collaborative for Change in which ten schools – including three of the district’s highest-performing schools – are collaborating extensively to share best practices and increase student achievement.
- ¶ Developed and rolled out the DCPS Effective Schools Framework to ensure a consistent standard of excellence for all schools, and to be transparent about the criteria by which we will evaluate schools.
- ¶ Launched the Full-Service School (FSS) model at 8 middle schools, provided extended social, behavioral, and academic supports for students.
- ¶ Launched the Schoolwide Application Model (SAM) at 6 elementary schools, serving the needs of all learners – with and without identified special needs – in an inclusive setting.
- ¶ Launched the planning process for a newly designed Eastern High School.
- ¶ Completed revision of the portion of the D.C. Municipal Regulations that regulates school discipline policy.

**WHERE WE WANT TO BE: *A compelling portfolio of schools that provide rigorous academics, strong student supports, and a variety of engaging themes***

Given the challenges DCPS still faces, we cannot simply *adjust* our school portfolio. We must essentially *remake* it. We will do so on four dimensions.

**Enhancing the fundamental quality of our school portfolio.** We will make changes to every DCPS school with one broad goal in mind: to ensure high student achievement occurs in every one of our classrooms. The way we approach these changes will vary by grade level, by school performance level, and ultimately by the strengths and interests of particular school communities.

- ¶ At the *early childhood* level, we will focus on expanding access to pre-school and pre-kindergarten for District three- and four-year-olds, as well as on building and maintaining program quality across all early childhood programs.
- ¶ At the *elementary school* level we will focus on developing our students' essential skills – in reading, writing, and math in particular – within a comprehensive school program. We will develop theme schools that create strong identities for schools and spark high levels of student and family engagement.
- ¶ At the *middle grade* level, we will focus on building a strong bridge between elementary and high school through building a positive culture, providing intensive supports, and challenging students beyond the basic skill levels. Our middle schools will offer both depth and breadth within their academic program – preparing students for rigorous high school programs and exposing them to world language and to a full range of extracurricular activities.
- ¶ At the *high school* level, we will focus on meeting the range of our students' developing interests and needs through specialized and thematic programs to fully prepare them for college, work, and life. All high school programs will prepare students for post-secondary education and equip them with the academic and social skills necessary for success in the work force.
- ¶ We will engage schools listed as *proficient* under NCLB in a cycle of continuous improvement, which will include enhancing our co-curricular and extracurricular offerings, providing thematic programs, and expanding higher level course offerings.
- ¶ We will engage schools listed as *underperforming* under NCLB in one or more of the following four change approaches:
  - *Aggressive improvement*, which will include intensive professional development for teachers and intensive academic supports for students (e.g., Saturday school, extended-day programs, ninth-grade academies, tiered curriculum interventions).
  - *Reconstitution*, which will include hiring school turnaround leaders and new teachers to fundamentally change the culture of a school.

- *Conversion* to a partnership school, which will entail handing the operation of a school to an educational partner, such as an Educational Management Organization, under a performance contract with DCPS.
- *Closure*. We will close schools that persistently underperform, despite our efforts at aggressive improvement.

Within five years, our school portfolio will look significantly different than it does today. We will have a mix of high-quality neighborhood schools; we will also have city-wide schools that draw students from across the District. We will have schools that offer the traditional range of classes; we will also have schools focused on a particular theme. We will have schools that DCPS operates directly, and schools we will operate in concert with known and reputable educational partners. Schools in DCPS will have excellent teachers and principals. As a result, we will have students whose achievement levels will be markedly higher than they are today.

**Ensuring accountability for performance.** The ultimate success of DCPS's portfolio does not depend solely on its makeup. It depends on high performance. To that end, we will hold each school in our portfolio to the same high standards.

In October 2008, we developed the DCPS Effective Schools Framework to ensure a consistent standard of excellence for all schools, and to be transparent about the criteria by which we will evaluate schools. Schools that consistently meet or exceed these standards will earn curricular, professional development, budgeting, and scheduling autonomy. Schools that consistently fail to meet accountability standards, despite our efforts to enable them to, will be held to the appropriate consequences—mandatory interventions, restructuring, or closure.

The result will be a system that encourages academic innovation and supports strong teaching. We will replicate successful academic programs and strong teaching models across the portfolio, and we will require the academic programs and teaching models that are less successful to enact measurable change.

**Making our learning environments safer, more modern, and more supportive.** For students to achieve at their highest levels, and for teachers to perform at their best, facilities must be in modern working condition; schools must be safe and secure; and discipline problems must decrease. The culture of every school must be supportive and nurturing for students of all kinds. We will focus on each of these school-environment issues as we shape our portfolio.

**Expanding our ability to meet special-education and English Language Learner (ELL) needs.** Finally, we will accelerate efforts within DCPS to develop programs for special-education students, to train teachers to educate students with special needs and with limited English proficiency, and to organize internally to better support special education and ELL programs. From both a financial standpoint and an educational standpoint, special education reform is among the most pressing issues DCPS faces. We treat it as a stand-alone section in this document—distinct from the main section on the portfolio—to emphasize its importance.

## HOW WE WILL GET THERE

We will take specific steps to enact change on each of the four dimensions listed above:

**Enhancing the fundamental quality of our schools.** With over 30 percent of our schools in PI-5 (Restructuring) status and an additional 12 percent in PI-4 status when this administration began its work, we will work to ensure that school improvements occur consistently and are sustainable. We will build a school portfolio that meets a broad range of student interests and needs, and, in doing so, leads to meaningful increases in student achievement. Specifically, we will:

- A. *Determine how many schools will undergo each type of change, and which schools will undergo each type of change.* We will undertake a series of initiatives to help us determine, first, how many schools will undergo reconstitution, conversion, and aggressive improvements each year, and second, which schools will see each type of change. Specifically, we will:
  1. *Gauge our capacity to engage underperforming schools in aggressive improvement, reconstitution, conversion, and closure.* The Office of Portfolio Management, working with the Office of the Chief Academic Officer, will make these determinations annually as part of the Quality School Review process. These decisions will focus on matching interventions with the particular needs of schools as determined through the Quality School Review process. Practically speaking, the decisions will also take into account four interdependent factors:
    - (a) *Capacity and strengths of the schools:* Our approach to school turnaround will leverage and build upon the strengths a school currently demonstrates – whether it’s an engaged parent body, a strong school culture, or energetic leadership.
    - (b) *Human capital:* We will gauge how quickly we can recruit turnaround principals—as well as teachers with appropriate expertise—to reconstitute schools. We will also assess the skills of external operators to scale up quickly.
    - (c) *Cost:* We will examine our budget to determine how many schools we can reconstitute year-to-year, and how many educational partners we can support to operate a portion of our schools.
    - (d) *Space:* We will determine how to most effectively leverage our existing space for reconstituted or partnership schools.

The outcome of these annual assessments will be a plan that defines the number of reconstituted schools and the number of partnership schools to be opened each year, along with the number that will undergo other aggressive improvements. As explained in more detail below, no schools will close for underperformance until we first engage them in an aggressive improvement phase.

2. *Develop principles of change for turning around underperforming elementary, middle, and high schools, and use them as guidelines for determining which specific schools should undergo each type of change.* Those principles are as follows.
  - (a) *Elementary schools.* Since our focus of change for elementary schools is on building students' essential skills, our change approach will in most cases focus on aggressive improvement, and particularly on intensive professional development for teachers. The best way to ensure that our students are building skills in a sound and consistent way is to ensure that our elementary curriculum is aligned with sound and consistent teaching methods and supported through intensive professional development. Early literacy will be a central focus of this work, given the fundamental importance of students reading on grade level by third grade. We will engage in job-embedded professional development strategies, with all teachers receiving rigorous training and ongoing support from school-based coaches, who in turn will receive significant centralized support. Our change approach will not be limited to professional development, however. We will ensure that all elementary schools offer a broad curriculum that includes instruction in music, art, and physical education. And for elementary schools whose performance has been persistently poor, we will consider reconstitution or conversion.
  - (b) *Middle schools.* Since 80 percent of our middle schools began 2008 in PI-4 or PI-5 status, we will consider reconstitution and conversion frequently. In concert, we will make a series of aggressive improvements at our middle schools. To create smoother transitions between elementary and middle grades, we have created a set of PK-8 schools, allowing elementary schools to add a grade until they grow into a full PK-8. To create smoother transitions to high school, we will offer intensive academic supports to students (e.g., extended-day programs, Saturday schools, in-school tutoring). We will also offer new co-curricular and extracurricular programs to capture developing student interests. Even as we work to bring under-performing students up to grade level in core subject areas, we will lay the groundwork for challenging students with courses in world language at all of our middle schools and the option of earning high school credit for Algebra I, for those students who are ready. Finally, the Full-Service School model will provide extensive wrap-around support for middle school students, ensuring that their social and emotional needs are addressed.
  - (c) *High schools.* With all of our comprehensive high schools in PI-5 status, we will consider reconstitution and conversion frequently, though on a staged basis. In concert, we will make a series of aggressive improvements at our high schools. We will offer intensive academic supports to students (e.g., ninth grade academies, Saturday schools, summer bridge, in-school tutoring). At the other end of the spectrum, students will have the opportunity to take on the challenge of AP courses, while recognizing that depending on their preparation, such courses may require more than a year to successfully complete. A full range of extracurricular programs will be offered at every

high school to capture developing student interests. Finally, we will explicitly build a college going culture in all of our high schools so that all students can see a clear path to post-secondary education. Individual graduation plans and advisory programs will form the foundation for all students to build towards strong post-secondary options.

3. *Expand the Quality School Review process to evaluate every underperforming school in the district, in order to determine which specific schools will undergo each type of change.* In the 2007-8 school year, all schools in PI-5 status underwent QSR. During the 2008-9 school year, all newly identified PI-5 schools will undergo the review. In addition, we will use the same tool to review schools that have qualified to apply for autonomous status. Ultimately, we expect all schools will be cycled through the process as part of a comprehensive review of schools for purpose of defining intervention needs, as well as identifying those schools whose performance has earned them autonomous status. The QSR process will use a consistent set of criteria, which will encompass the following elements:

- (a) *Teaching and Learning*
- (b) *Leadership*
- (c) *Job-Embedded Professional Development*
- (d) *Resources*
- (e) *Safe and Effective Learning Environment*
- (f) *Family and Community Engagement*

- B. *Begin improvement efforts across the school portfolio.* Once we determine how many and which schools will undergo each type of change, we will begin our improvement efforts as follows:

1. *Enact continuous improvements at high-performing schools.* We will enact continuous improvements at schools listed as proficient under NCLB. These efforts will include:
  - (a) *Supplementing current programming with additional high-level academic courses and with a broader range of academic offerings*
  - (b) *Adding extracurricular programs at secondary schools to engage student interests*
2. *Enact aggressive improvements at PI-4 and PI-5 schools.* We will move with urgency to engage all PI-5 schools in aggressive improvement efforts, particularly those that will not be reconstituted or converted. We will move with the same urgency for PI-4 schools in order to keep them out of PI-5 status.
3. *Expand aggressive improvements to PI-2 and PI-3 schools.* After we enact aggressive improvements at PI-4 and PI-5 schools, we will expand those

improvements to PI-2 and PI-3 schools. This expansion is critical to lifting student achievement across the entire district—not just at the very lowest performing schools.

*C. Reconstitute and convert schools.*

1. *Reconstitute schools.* Barring capacity constraints, we will reconstitute eight PI-5 schools in SY2008-9 and an additional three to five in SY2009-10. Specific schools to be reconstituted will be identified by the QSR, as described above. All staff must reapply, with a cap on the percentage of current staff that may return. In some cases new turnaround leaders will be identified; in others existing leaders will have the opportunity to rebuild their faculty.
2. *Convert schools into partnership schools.* In 2008, three high schools entered a Phase One partnership year, with the intention of entering full implementation in the 2009-10 school year. Future candidates for partnership conversion will be determined utilizing the QSR tool described above.
3. *Parallel to the process of identifying DCPS schools that would benefit from a partnership, we will continue to identify school turnaround partners who excel at radically advancing school achievement through implementing best-in-class school turnaround strategies.*
4. *The following activities support the partnership schools process:*
  - (a) *Partner Selection Process:* We are using an open and rigorous design process to select partners to run partnership schools. Through this process, we are identifying national and local partners already excelling at managing turnaround schools. These partners receive priority invitations.
  - (b) *Selection Process Criteria:* We are selecting partners based on a set of rigorous and uniform criteria. Partners demonstrate the ability to:
    - (i) Maintain an average attendance rate greater than the DCPS average,
    - (ii) Maintain an average graduation rate greater than the DCPS average, and
    - (iii) Make consistent annual gains in student achievement on value-added growth measures.
  - (c) *Contracts for selected partners that include expectations for performance.*
5. *Give partnership schools curricular, operational, and staffing autonomies, to allow them room to innovate in a collaborative cluster of autonomous schools.* Principals leading partnership schools will operate together with dedicated leadership from the Chancellor's Office, and will exercise significant autonomy in decisions regarding curriculum, instructional practices, professional development, and school operations. This autonomy is granted based on the prior success of the organizations with which these schools will enter partnerships. With this autonomy will come greater accountability.

- D. *Introduce “theme” schools and programs centered on both curricular and pedagogical themes, including Arts Integration, STEM, and World Language and Culture. In the spring of 2009 we will:*
- 1. Release an application that will allow schools to apply into the DCPS “Catalyst Project.” We will accept five schools in each of the three determined thematic areas.*
  - 2. Begin to engage schools in a yearlong collaborative planning process, through which we will create curricula for the theme programs.*
  - 3. Provide teachers in selected schools with targeted professional development in relevant thematic areas.*
  - 4. Create evaluations in partnership with the selected schools to determine the efficacy of the thematic programs. “Catalyst” schools will also be held accountable to the same student achievement standards as other DCPS schools.*
- E. *Expand access to early childhood programs for three- and four-year-olds, while building and maintaining program quality across all early childhood programs. We will:*
- 1. Work to increase the number of seats in DCPS pre-school and pre-kindergarten programs. We will assess current program enrollment, determine areas of potential for greatest growth, and identify high quality programs for expansion. In school year 2009-10, we will open between 80 and 270 new seats in high-demand pre-school and pre-kindergarten programs across the city.*
  - 2. Link all early childhood programs to DCPS early learning standards.*
  - 3. Establish a consistent, developmentally appropriate system for measuring child progress and identifying early signs of learning disability.*
  - 4. Create and implement an annual comprehensive assessment of current programs to determine program quality, identify areas for improvement, and select high quality programs for expansion.*
  - 5. Develop and implement intervention strategies in areas identified for improvement.*
  - 6. Increase the number of specialized programs (ex. Reggio Emilia, Montessori).*
  - 7. Develop demonstration centers at select model programs as a resource for teacher training, parent education, comprehensive services, and research.*
  - 8. Hire on-site coaches for job-embedded teacher training in early childhood education, with a projected total of one for every five schools.*



- F. *Close chronically underperforming schools.* We will close schools if they fail to show progress despite our efforts at aggressive improvement. More detail on consequences for persistently low performance appears in the next major section below.
- G. *Close schools that are significantly under-enrolled.* At the end of the 2007-8 school year, we closed 23 of our most underutilized school buildings. We did so to redirect resources to where they matter most: to improving the classroom learning experience, to engaging students more fully in their education, and to retaining more students within DCPS.
- H. *Create an Office of Portfolio Management to strategically manage the portfolio.* Key duties will include:
1. *Building internal capacity around existing programs in the service of short-term portfolio development.* This includes identifying high performing schools that could expand their impact.
  2. *Building relationships with local institutions and potential operators of partnership schools and managing the selection process.*
  3. *Working with the Chief Academic Officer to design a mutually agreed upon set of metrics upon which the portfolio of schools will be assessed.* With these metrics, we will evaluate whether the portfolio is meeting all student needs (primarily student learning) and interests. This will also require partnerships with the Office of Family and Community Engagement to survey parents and students about needs they see as going unmet.
  4. *Working with the Chief Academic Officer to ensure that best practices are shared across the portfolio, both between themed schools and traditional schools and between partnership schools and DCPS-operated schools.*
- I. *Institute a Comprehensive Staffing Model (CSM) to ensure that all schools have the core resources necessary for success.* CSM is a budgeting and resource allocation framework that represents the most equitable way to allocate resources across the district, ensuring all schools have a team of practitioners to provide what we have defined as a standard set of school offerings and services:
1. *Administrative Support (i.e. Principal, Business Manager, Registrar)*
  2. *Enrichment (i.e. Visual Arts, Music, Physical Education)*
  3. *Academic Support (i.e. Guidance Counselors, Professional Developers, Media Center Specialist)*
  4. *Wellness Support (i.e. Social Worker, Psychologist, Nurse)*

Many schools lacked these basic resources prior to the implementation of CSM in the 2008-09 school year. Over the next five years, CSM – which was implemented fairly

rigidly in its first year – will be evaluated and modified with feedback from key stakeholders. In the 2009-2010 school year, for example, CSM will be updated to incorporate community feedback seeking greater flexibility. While it will retain its fundamental principle of allocating a core set of positions to all schools, CSM will begin to include enrollment-based “flexible funds” to staff and resource the remainder of the school program. This will allow principals to tailor the academic program to the specific needs of each school community.

**Ensuring accountability for school performance.** As noted above, diversity alone does not make a great school portfolio. High performance does. To ensure that our schools meet high accountability standards, DCPS has established an Effective Schools Framework, which will provide clear expectations for all schools in DCPS.

This framework will apply to every school within the DCPS system—schools operated by DCPS and schools operated by educational partners. The framework will provide the basis for our Quality School Review, the Principal’s performance evaluation, and an annual School Report Card, which will detail a school’s progress on a set of standard measures. *All* schools within DCPS must and will be held to the same accountability standards if we are to measure schools evenly, work to improve schools consistently, and reward and penalize schools uniformly.

Specifically, we will:

J. *Evaluate our schools on a continuing basis. We will:*

1. *Develop scoring criteria for all schools within DCPS, in communication with the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE).* School success will be gauged using multiple measures (quantitative and qualitative). These measures will align to the goals of the district in the three broad categories below:
  - (a) *Student Achievement:* as measured by the growth and status of student performance using the DC-CAS and other relevant measures.
  - (b) *School Environment:* attendance and student/parent/teacher satisfaction as measured by surveys.
  - (c) *Parent and Community Engagement:* as measured by parent surveys.
2. *Develop school report cards based on scoring criteria and grade schools on performance.* Consequences – both positive and negative as appropriate – will be developed in association with school scorecard performance.

K. *Enable our schools to achieve higher performance.* DCPS will create a binary system of autonomy to enable schools to achieve higher performance. Schools whose educational and teaching models are working will be rewarded with room to innovate further, while those whose educational and teaching models are less successful will be given tools to improve. Specifically, we will:

1. *Give schools that both receive high grades on report cards and receive commensurately high marks on a Quality School Review varying degrees of curricular, operational, and staffing autonomy, as follows:*

- (a) *Budget Autonomy*: These schools may allocate site budgets as they desire, so long as they satisfy applicable compliance and/or regulatory concerns.
  - (b) *Instructional Autonomy*: Within the context of the Teaching and Learning Framework, these schools may create and implement an instructional program, with particular focus or themes of their own choosing.
  - (c) *Professional Development Autonomy*: These schools may participate in and create their own school-based professional development.
  - (d) *Curricular Autonomy*: When DCPS adopts new curricular materials, autonomous schools will receive a commensurate amount of financial resources to conduct their own adoptions.
  - (e) *Schedule Autonomy*: Within the parameters of the WTU contract, these schools may create their own schedules.
2. *Engage schools that receive lower grades on report cards in continued aggressive improvement efforts.*
- L. *Establish rewards and consequences for performance.* We will incentivize continuously high performance and intervene in response to continuously low performance. This is the only way to ensure schools strive for accountability standards. We will:
- 1. *Reward consistently high performance.* DCPS will consider the autonomy it gives high-performing schools a reward in itself.
  - 2. *Intervene persistently in response to low performance.* Schools receiving lower grades will enter a cycle of change, receiving aggressive improvement support from DCPS for a period of time. The length of the change cycle will be shorter for partnership schools than for DCPS-operated schools, since partnership schools will run on a performance contract. At the end of their respective cycles of change, DCPS-operated schools still receiving low grades will be subject to closure. Partnership schools will lose their contracts.

**Making our schools safer, more modern, and more supportive.** Schools that are in good physical condition send a message to students that we value them. Schools that are safe and supportive allow students to focus on their education above all else. As we expand the school portfolio, then, we will:

- M. *Work with OPEFM to ensure our facilities are in good physical condition and that the Master Facilities Plan meets our strategic goals.* We will work closely with the Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization (OPEFM) to ensure that school stabilization, school modernization, and work-order prioritization occur on an expedited timetable. We will also partner with OPEFM to ensure that the Master Facilities Plan is continuously updated to reflect our evolving strategic initiatives, including , for example, specialized programs, academy structures, increased pre-school.

N. *Make our schools safer and more supportive.* We will make our schools safer by enhancing our efforts both to prevent and correct disciplinary incidents. We will do so in three ways: by instituting clear rules and expectations for in-school behavior; by creating structures and supports to help principals, teachers, and students meet those rules and expectations; and by ensuring schools act quickly and effectively when those rules and expectations are broken.

1. *Institute clear rules and expectations for in-school behavior.*

At the district level, we will:

- (a) *Revise the municipal regulations that establish processes for responding to serious student behavior issues, with an eye to increasing support for students (Chapter 25).* We will also outline conditions that must be in place at every school to ensure a safe and orderly environment.
- (b) *Review all new suspensions in the Office of Youth Engagement or the Instructional Superintendent's office and ensure that all suspension data is documented in STARS, with the aim to reduce the rate of suspension at each school.*
- (c) *Increase the rate of attendance reporting at each school to 100% each day and ensure that effective attendance policies are enforced district-wide, with the objective of raising the average rate of student attendance to 95% of school days and reducing the truancy rate across the district.*

At the school level, every building will develop a shared statement of rules and expectations tailored to meet those conditions set at the district level. Principals will be asked to:

- (a) *Involve students, teachers, and parents in drafting this statement, to meet the challenges particular to his or her school.*
- (b) *Re-examine and update these rules and expectations at the beginning of each school year, again with a committee of students, teachers, and parents.*

Teachers will have flexibility to add rules for student behavior in their own classrooms as they see fit, given prior approval from principals and given that they reflect the school-wide expectations.

2. *Create structures and supports to help teachers and students meet those rules and expectations.*

For students, we will:

- (a) *Create new adult advisory relationships.* We will group all students into advisory cohorts at the secondary level, assigning each cohort to a school staff member. These adult advisors will act as mentors to students, checking in with them frequently on academic issues (e.g., their test preparation and scores, their post-high school plans) and personal issues.

- (b) *Establish attendance committees at each school.* Attendance committees will be composed of counselors, social workers, teachers, and any other school staff needed to identify and coordinate intervention plans for students who have accumulated 10 or more unexcused absences.
- (c) *Bolster Student Support Teams (SSTs) to coordinate academic and/or behavioral interventions for at-risk students (e.g., students who are academically not on grade level, chronically absent or truant, or at-risk for grade-level retention).* SSTs are school-based committees that include administrators, general educators, counselors, parents, and other staff. Interventions will include:
  - (i) Documented services for students returning from suspension, to facilitate a smooth transition back into the school community.
  - (ii) Peer mediation programs to facilitate peer-led prevention and intervention.
- (d) *Provide alternative school settings for students whose needs are not being met in the traditional classroom.* This will include Twilight Programs for overage middle grades students and for high school students not succeeding in the standard school setting. It will also include alternative high schools where students can opt in to programs that engage youth for whom our traditional high schools are not working.
- (e) *Provide incentives for students to meet high standards for behavior, attendance, and academic performance.* The Capital Gains initiative is an innovative new program run in partnership with Harvard University's Education Innovation Laboratory to offer short-term financial incentives to encourage students to do what is in their long term interest: study hard and increase achievement. During its pilot year in 2008-2009, teachers and school staff in 15 schools are monitoring students in five different areas related to student achievement, including attendance, behavior and academic performance. Students earn points for their performance on each of their school's five chosen indicators. When too many DCPS students are not getting the preparation they need during middle school, Capital Gains will be able to target middle school students with rewards that we expect will keep students more engaged and driven towards achievement in these critical years. If the program shows the benefits we expect, we will consider continuing beyond the two-year research pilot and expanding it to include other schools.

For teachers, we will begin professional development programs aimed at:

- (a) *Increasing effective instruction to keep students focused on and engaged in learning.*
- (b) *Enforcing behavioral expectations for students that both model and require respectful interactions between all members of the school community.*
- (c) *Increasing effective personal interaction with students (e.g., how to "speak to kids," how to calm tense situations).*

For all teachers and principals, we will continue working to ensure that they have effective systems and structures in place to promote positive student behavior and respond to misbehavior.

3. *Ensure schools can act quickly and effectively when rules and expectations are broken.* We will act on two fronts to ensure this happens: we will enable teachers and administrators to respond more uniformly to disciplinary infractions, and we will improve the physical security of our schools.

For teachers and administrators, we will:

- (a) *Revise Chapter 25 of Title V of the District of Columbia Municipal Regulations, which governs student discipline at DCPS.* In doing so, we will:
  - (i) Create a list of all student infractions, ordered from the most severe to the most minor, with specific corresponding consequences for each. We will devote specific attention to specifying why and for how long students may be suspended.
  - (ii) Hold training sessions to ensure that teachers and principals are using the policies consistently.
- (b) *Ensure that school suspension is an educationally viable consequence for disciplinary infractions.* Currently, our CHOICE program has limited capacity for suspended students; students suspended for less than a period of approximately ten days often remain at home to fall behind in their work. To remedy this problem, we will:
  - (i) Consider expanding the CHOICE program to include more seats.
  - (ii) Consider ending out-of-school suspension altogether, and opening in-school suspension classrooms within each of our schools.
- (c) *Work with the Office of the City Administrator and the Deputy Mayor for Education to gather data on current truancy processes, identify trends and best practices, and draw conclusions about ideal school and district staffing models for truancy prevention.* We will also work with Child and Family Services (CFS) and Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) to ensure that truancy is reported and that students referred to court receive the appropriate support.

From a physical security standpoint, we will work with the Office of School Security to:

- (a) *Enhance security technology within schools.* We will do this by:
  - (i) Replacing aging metal detectors and x-ray machines.
  - (ii) Adding additional security cameras to schools.

- (iii) Creating new monitoring centers at secondary schools. Currently, only a small handful of staff in DCPS's central office is responsible for monitoring the 3,500 surveillance cameras throughout the school system. Though principals have access to the video monitoring system, school surveillance is not their most pressing responsibility. By creating monitoring centers in particularly challenging schools, DCPS will be able to:
  - Improve identification of and response time to security incidents.
  - Potentially reduce security incidents, as students become aware of the speedier identification of fights and violence and the enactment of consequences.
  - Potentially reduce the number of security staff in schools, since monitoring centers will create a more efficient dispatch system for responding to disciplinary incidents.
- (iv) Hire experienced law-enforcement personnel to provide security to schools. These personnel will not be limited to current MPD officers or School Resource Officers (SROs). We will also recruit retired officials from various law-enforcement agencies across DC.
- (v) Determine the correct number of law-enforcement officials to hire based on the success of our school-to-school monitoring and dispatch systems.
- (vi) Create closer coordination between the Office of Security and OPEFM, to ensure that new construction and renovations to old buildings are aligned with security interests (e.g., ensure that all windows in new schools are operable).

**Expanding DCPS's ability to manage the needs of special-education students and English Language Learners.** DCPS is committed to ensuring that all students in the District of Columbia have access to an excellent education. We are responsible for ensuring that students with disabilities and English Language Learners are able to fully participate in school life.

*A. Special education.*

DCPS's handling of special education is ineffective at best. We spend one-third of our annual budget on special education; we incur especially high costs because case management is ineffective, often leading to costly lawsuits, and because special-education students often leave DCPS to attend private programs due to DCPS's historical inability or unwillingness to provide adequate services. This has left the city with large private tuition bills and ballooning transportation costs.

To draw students with special needs back into DCPS, we will significantly increase the number and quality of educational programs available to them. Special education reforms within DCPS will also include better teacher training, better case management and compliance, and better internal organization to support new special education

programs. Our reforms will align both with the December 2007 Blackman Jones consent agreement and with the District of Columbia Municipal Regulations.

In order to achieve these reforms, the Office of Special Education will:

- Ensure that every student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is updated, relevant, and provides avenues for students to be educated with non-disabled peers.
- Work with other DCPS departments and agencies to build early intervention services, foster positive, supportive school climates, and provide mental health services for all students who need them.
- Attract, train and retain high quality teachers and service providers.
- Ensure compliance with outstanding consent decrees and IDEA.

The Office of Special Education has three guiding principles which will direct us in the years to come:

- *Excellent Education* - Students with disabilities get an excellent education.
- *Success* - Students with disabilities become successful adults, holding good jobs, living independently, and engaging with their communities.
- *Inclusion* - Students with disabilities are educated in classrooms with their non-disabled peers and participate fully in school life.

In the next five years, DCPS will take the following necessary steps to improve special education within the District of Columbia.

#### **School Year 1: 2008-2009**

- *Transform the relationship between the Office of Special Education (OSE) and schools* so that schools have maximum resources to provide excellent education to students within the District of Columbia. OSE will move from the role of provider of services to one that provides resources and expertise, in which principals have ownership of programs and OSE is responsible for ensuring program quality. Accordingly, the OSE budget will be pushed from the central office to schools.
- *Comply with the Blackman-Jones Consent Decree.* OSE will develop a legal services unit in the Office of Special Education that is accountable for implementation of HOD/SAs and the early resolution of complaints. This will enable us to increase the number of staff dedicated to implementation of HOD/SAs and quick settlement of cases.
- *Pilot Exemplary School Programs.* We have launched 16 exemplary schools focused on highly supportive and integrated learning environments for students with disabilities and their peers. The Schoolwide Application Model (SAM) is in place at 8 elementary schools, providing differentiated instruction for students with and



without learning disabilities in the same classrooms. Full Service Schools are functioning at 8 middle schools, providing wrap-around supports for students to support their socio-emotional needs.

### **School Year 2: 2009-2010**

- *Reduce private placements and transportation costs.* Currently, special education transportation costs DCPS millions of dollars each year. By improving programs and returning students to their home schools, DCPS will reduce both student placement and transportation costs.
- *Build excellent programs for children within the District of Columbia.* OSE will expand the SAM and Full-Service models to additional schools, which will establish highly supportive and integrated learning environments for students with disabilities and their peers.
- *Create School Profiles that improve service.* DCPS will develop a comprehensive profile of each school and determine the specific special education program needs at the school level. Then, using a mixture of DCPS-developed programs and public/private partnerships, the Office of Special Education will ensure that each school can leverage an array of services to special education students. These services will allow special education students to participate fully in school life and be educated alongside their non-disabled peers as much as is possible.
- *Establish excellent supports and training opportunities for teachers.* School staff will receive coaching and training to enable them to educate children consistent with these guiding principles.
- *Build confidence in DCPS among parents and families of children.* Parents are respected members of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team whose insights and recommendations are valued. Parents will receive the support they need to participate as team members; support will include transportation, child care, interpreter services and pre-meeting briefings.

### **School Year 3: 2010-2011**

- *Response to Intervention (RTI).* This process includes the provision of systematic, research-based instruction and interventions to struggling learners. RTI is designed as an early intervention to prevent long-term academic failure, and DCPS will use it to prevent the over-identification of special education students.
- *Launch world class autism programs.* Our autism classrooms will be based on the principles of Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) and positive reinforcement. With the support of hands-on ABA Specialists and an evidence-based RTI curriculum, our students will be receiving the highest quality of services. DCPS will also be expanding the program by developing Aspergers classrooms in various schools. The program will provide Theory of Mind/social skills intervention for our students with Aspergers.

- *Complete compliance with the Blackman-Jones consent decree.* The Blackman/Jones litigation alleges that DCPS has failed to implement hearing officer determinations and settlement agreements (HODs/SAs) in a timely manner in violation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. In the ADR Agreement, the parties agreed on a backlog reduction plan designed to reduce the initial backlog (overdue HODs and SAs issued before 3/1/06) and the subsequent backlog (overdue HODs and SAs issued on or after 3/1/06). The Resolution Team has enhanced the initial Backlog Reduction Plan to include the use of investigators, quick settlements, and compliance case managers, who will work to implement all cases in a timely manner and to eliminate the backlog so that no cases are overdue.

#### **School Year 4: 2011-2012**

- *More inclusion for more students.* Students with disabilities will be educated and integrated with their non-disabled peers, across settings, across schools.
- *Higher achievement for students with disabilities.* Students with disabilities will demonstrate academic achievement in reading, writing and math due to systematic instruction based on the DCPS Teaching and Learning Framework.

#### **B. English Language Learners**

Fifteen percent of students in DCPS come from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds, and 9 percent (over 4,000 students) are English Language Learners (ELLs). There is a persistent gap in achievement between our ELLs and their English language-proficient peers, particularly in the area of reading comprehension and at the high school level.

Our ELL-focused reforms, like our special education reforms, will be guided by the principles of inclusion and of an excellent education for all students. Over the next five years, the Office of Bilingual Education (OBE) will take the following steps to improve service to and raise achievement across our ELL population:

- *Enhance training for all teachers in working with diverse populations.* We must significantly increase the capacity of our general education teachers to serve ELLs effectively. We are currently reviewing instructional delivery for ELLs in underperforming schools in an effort to re-engineer teaching and learning around research-based strategies proven to raise ELL achievement. Moreover, in addition to the on-going professional development provided by OBE on nationally recognized, English-language proficiency instruction, as well as the graduate courses on ELL instruction offered in partnership with Catholic University, we will launch professional development in key areas including second language acquisition, differentiated instruction, cultural competency, and multicultural education.
- *Establish increased accountability for effective ELL instruction.* We will work in concert with the Office of the Deputy Chancellor for Human Capital to ensure that teacher observation rubrics include appropriate measures of ELL instruction. We will

also collaborate with the Office of the State Superintendent's Credentialing Office as it works to rewrite D.C. teacher certification requirements. This work will ensure that teachers who serve ELL students have the tools to be effective.

- *Align Dual Language programs around core elements of effective Dual Language instruction.* We will evaluate all Dual Language programs operating in DCPS on core elements of their program implementation and issue recommendations with the aim of increasing standardization of Dual Language programs around effective practices.
- *Create a one-stop intake center with comprehensive services for linguistically and culturally diverse (LCD) students.* DCPS enrolls students from 135 countries who speak over 120 different languages; each year, our Intake and Assessment Center screens 1200 LCD students to determine their instructional needs, facilitate their placement into the most appropriate educational programs, and provide orientation to the DCPS system. In order to better facilitate the enrollment of eligible LCD students in DCPS, we will expand the Intake Center to provide a comprehensive set of placement services, including D.C. residency verification, immunization documentation review, and vaccination.
- *Increase parent engagement among LCD families in DCPS.* In addition to ensuring language access to vital information for LCD families in compliance with the D.C. Language Access Law, the Office of Bilingual Education will coordinate with Parent Resource Centers in wards with large LCD populations to ensure that they meet the needs of our LCD parents. We will also work with principals to facilitate the inclusion of LCD parents in school-based activities and decision-making groups such as Local School Restructuring Teams (LSRTs).

## II. Great People

Our people are critical to our ability to transform DCPS and improve student achievement. While DCPS has many talented, dedicated, and effective personnel, we need to recruit more and retain the best. Consequently, we must prioritize the recruitment, development, and retention of the highest caliber of talent for our schools and central office.

A central tenet of DCPS's approach to human capital is recognizing that there should be *different priorities for different groups at different times*. The strategies we use for principals, teachers, and central office staff ultimately need to have the same human capital elements, but certain reforms are more important initially to some groups than others. In this spirit, we have examined a broad array of best practice levers that schools can use to improve human capital and we have prioritized them across each group over years 1-5. The result is a compendium of strategic initiatives for principals, teachers, and central office staff:

- ¶ Principals: recruitment and professional development, including induction training focused on managerial/operational skills and ongoing coaching in instructional leadership
- ¶ Teachers: replacement of poor performers, improved induction, focused job-embedded professional development, career ladders, compensation, and evaluation
- ¶ Central office staff: evaluation and performance management, recruitment, and selection

We will transform the DCPS human capital system over the next five years. This document begins with a brief assessment of where this administration started with respect to these critical areas, outlines our aspirations for the future, and provides detail on how we will achieve our goals.

### **WHERE WE STARTED: *A Snapshot as of Early 2008***

In order to improve student achievement, DCPS needs to strengthen the human capital system supporting three talent populations: principals, teachers, and central office staff.

- ¶ **Principals.** DCPS must improve its systems for hiring, evaluating, and developing principals.
  - While DCPS has replaced approximately half of its principals over the last few years, there is still a significant need to bring additional leadership talent to the district.
  - Despite some gains in principal recruitment, DCPS still lacks a critical mass of leaders with instructional expertise and/or a proven track record of success in *turning around* underperforming schools.

- DCPS has no mechanism in place to identify and cultivate emerging talent within the district, which precludes us from efforts to “grow our own” leaders.
  - DCPS needs to radically improve the hiring timeline for principals to ensure that new hires have the appropriate time to prepare for the school year. In 2007 DCPS had 20 schools without principals three months before the school year began.
  - While an evaluation system is currently in place for principals, it fails to put the focus on the bottom line—student achievement. Without this component there can be no meaningful evaluation of principal performance.
  - Principals receive limited professional development on how to be instructional leaders.
- ¶ **Teachers.** DCPS must improve the induction, ongoing professional development, compensation, and evaluation of its teachers.
- DCPS has approximately 4,000 teachers. Of the 145 schools classified during the 2006-07 school year, only 42 schools made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in reading and mathematics. Despite these results, we did not have an effective teacher evaluation process.
  - There is no comprehensive professional development program for teachers. Professional development has not been systematic, nor aligned to the district’s goals.
  - DCPS does not provide the resources, such as professional development, nor the compensation model, such as pay for performance, to enable us to recruit and retain the highest caliber of talent.
- ¶ **Central office staff.** DCPS must clarify the roles and responsibilities of central office staff, as well as evaluate its performance.
- Work done in the central office is more costly and less efficient than comparable districts.
  - Until last year, there was no regular evaluation of central office staff performance and no consequences for poor performance. There are no monetary rewards for high performance.
  - Some central office employees lack a customer service ethic and may not understand their important connection to schools and student achievement.
  - There has traditionally been no recruitment and selection strategy for central office staff. Often the District hired employees that were unprepared for work in administration.

### **WHAT WE HAVE ACCOMPLISHED: *Progress as of Early 2009***

Since the start of this plan, we have made strides forward with respect to teachers, principals, and the central office.

- ¶ Selected a strong new class of principals, from an applicant pool that provided 14 candidates for every one position.
- ¶ Aligned the monthly principal institutes with the elements of the Effective Schools Framework, providing focused professional development and sharing of best practices around these elements.
- ¶ Provided instructional coaches at every school with the express purpose of supporting teachers' professional development.
- ¶ Launched "PD Planner" in July 2008 to provide DCPS staff with a central database of all professional development offerings through which they can register for, maintain records of, and evaluate their professional development activities. In the first seven months of operation, PD Planner managed over 225 professional development activities and gained over 1800 registered users.
- ¶ Denied tenure to 75 probationary teachers who were not adequately meeting performance standards.
- ¶ Developed and implemented a standard online assessment system for all central office employees, with training for all managers in how to effectively conduct semi-annual assessments of all staff.
- ¶ Developed a robust internship program at the Central Office, with stiff competition among high quality undergraduate and graduate students for summer and year-long internships.

**WHERE WE WANT TO BE: *The most highly effective educators in the country who are supported in and rewarded for their work***

With our human capital strategy, we aspire to be a talent management model for other districts, with high-caliber people who are committed to and capable of improving student achievement. This is the vision of DCPS human capital we are working toward:

- ¶ A reliable, strong pipeline of principals who will receive relevant and rigorous professional development
  - Best-in-class recruitment, with the goal of seven **high-quality** principal candidates for every vacancy and three qualified candidates "pre-approved" by the chancellor for every community panel
  - A clearly defined career ladder that promotes and retains the best internal talent to the principalship
  - Evaluations that effectively assess principals' strengths and weaknesses, providing a blueprint for professional development

- ¶ High-caliber teachers who are recognized and rewarded for their performance
  - Comprehensive professional development that provides teachers with differentiated training that is job-embedded wherever appropriate
  - A school year that begins with zero avoidable teacher vacancies
  - A performance-based compensation plan for individual teachers, as well as for schools
- ¶ An efficient central office staff that is held accountable for its performance
  - A performance-based accountability system driven by data from departmental scorecards and stakeholder satisfaction surveys
  - The reorganization of central office to support the performance-based accountability system

To ensure the success of our vision, we must have a clear understanding of how the many components of our plan fit together. In other words, there is a unifying, strategic coherence that drives our initiatives. For example, differentiating between teachers by means of financial and non-financial performance-based compensation requires effective recruiting initiatives to maintain a strong pipeline of a high caliber of teachers. DCPS will develop its recruiting capabilities in order to create sustainable strategies with respect to selection and induction. At the same time, these two initiatives depend on the quality leadership of our principals, to whom we will afford the autonomy to cull teachers based on a rigorous, accountability-driven culture. Understanding the interdependencies of our efforts will allow us to execute our initiatives successfully.

## HOW WE WILL GET THERE

What follows are the full set of strategic initiatives we will pursue for each of the three groups we will focus on within DCPS: teachers (including instructional aides, substitutes, etc.), principals (including other school leadership), and central office staff.

### Teachers

- A. *Bolster induction programs and professional development focused on improving instruction.*

We will set higher expectations through a performance management system and mindset, and we will support our teachers in meeting those expectations through dramatically improved professional development opportunities. These initiatives will include:

1. *Improve our New Teacher Orientation/Institute for beginning teachers and develop and implement comprehensive training courses for first- and second-year teachers.* We will evaluate the possibility of complementing this training with a rigorous professional development programs for second-year teachers (e.g., the

Skillful Teacher program). Key elements of all of our professional development will include self assessment, collaborative dialogue, and self-reflection.

2. *Repurpose professional development resources to focus on intensive school-based coaching and mentoring on how to improve instructional practices.* To bolster the teacher awareness and commitment to professional development, we will emphasize that professional development is about changing teaching mindset and behaviors – not just participating in workshops. To achieve this we plan to:
  - (a) *create formal networking opportunities for teachers to build communities of practice across the school portfolio and develop their sense of professionalism;*
  - (b) *create professional learning communities within each school that focus on the work of teaching and learning to improve student achievement results; and most importantly,*
  - (c) *identify and train school-based professional developers to serve in a non-evaluative capacity to coach teachers in their classrooms.*

Research clearly indicates that teachers who practice new skills while on the job and who receive frequent feedback from non-evaluative figures demonstrate greater mastery of those skills, as well as higher rates of retention. In the 2008-2009 school year, we initiated substantial investments in building a team of school-based coaches who play a number of roles throughout the school – professional developer, mentor, facilitator, resource provider, program manager, content specialist, data support specialist, and catalyst for change.

3. *Align professional development program with the elements of the Teaching and Learning Framework.* All teacher professional development – through professional developers at the school level and through central offerings – will align explicitly with elements of the Teaching and Learning Framework, which in turn is aligned with teachers’ performance assessments.
4. *Ensure the sharing of successful educational practices across the portfolio.* To help facilitate this dissemination, we will create a professional development website that stores and showcases best practices across the district, and we will establish regular forums to bring together teachers from different schools in the portfolio to share ideas.
5. *Maintain and strengthen our new online system, “PD Planner,” to track the supply and demand of professional development courses.* Moving forward, we will work to align our professional development programming around the performance expectations outlined in the DCPS Teaching and Learning Framework. This will support teachers in capitalizing on their use of PD Planner to achieve professional growth in areas identified for improvement.
6. *Augment special education training for all teachers.* In our effort to reduce the number of DCPS students being served in non-public placements, we must significantly increase the capacity of our general education teachers to effectively



serve students with special needs. This must include professional development in differentiating instruction, as well as training in effective IEP parent-teacher conferences to increase consistency and successful placement. We will also use the SAM school model – which provides extensive and focused professional development – to promote inclusive instructional practices by training teachers to work effectively in inclusive classrooms (i.e., classrooms that include special education students and general education students).

*B. Define and roll out a career ladder to provide multiple advancement opportunities.*

A career ladder provides opportunities for outstanding teachers to grow, learn new skills, take on additional responsibility, and receive greater remuneration over time. The opportunity for recognition and increased responsibility can also serve to incentivize teachers to improve their craft.

We plan to create roles for experienced and effective teachers to share their expertise to help support the development of their more junior colleagues. These roles will include instructional leadership and mentorship programs and will be fully voluntary. They will also provide a means of publicly recognizing and rewarding the highest-performing teachers.

Teachers may advance up the ladder based on years of experience, professional development, coaching hours completed, and in particular, student performance.

*C. Create a comprehensive performance management system.*

A performance management system encompasses the tools that an organization uses to set expectations, measure the performance, and guide the professional development of its people. These tools include job descriptions, performance norms (including clear goals/deliverables for each employee), review and feedback processes, and the overarching performance expectations of the professional culture.

DCPS's current performance management system is inadequate, and the performance and development of its teaching professionals suffer as a result. Job descriptions are absent or too general. Performance norms are overly complex, insufficiently demanding, and in practice are infrequently used. Review and feedback processes rely almost exclusively on formal annual reviews without the more informal and frequent constructive criticism that can help improve day-to-day performance. Moreover, these reviews don't adequately distinguish excellent from poor performance—almost all teachers receive satisfactory ratings. Finally, performance expectations are not demanding enough, and DCPS provides insufficient support such as coaching or mentorship for teachers striving to meet high expectations of their own.

We plan to focus substantial energy on creating and rolling out these tools, making performance management a centerpiece of our plan to improve teaching quality. Not only teachers, but also paraprofessionals (such as teaching aides), substitute teachers, and others with direct responsibility for student learning will be incorporated. DCPS will develop and enforce a performance culture in part through meaningful semi-annual evaluations tied directly to performance scorecards, coupled with differentiated rewards and recognition.

We will build on best practices from other school districts and teacher organizations (e.g., Teach for America, The New Teacher Project), customizing them for the DCPS context. We will then use these tools to help develop the performance culture that is a hallmark of outstanding organizations.

While our teachers are evaluated annually already, as mentioned above, those evaluations do not reveal meaningful difference in teacher quality when the vast majority of teachers are given at least a satisfactory rating. Moreover, the assessments are based on a dizzying array of subjective criteria that do not place student achievement at the heart of the evaluation. We plan to simplify and redesign teacher evaluations around six core components:

1. *Growth in Student Achievement at the Individual Teacher Level:* The core responsibility of an educator is to ensure that his or her students grow academically. A value-added model is being developed to provide growth estimates using the DC-CAS for English and math teachers in grades 4-8 (approximately 18% of the teaching force) starting in 2009-2010. Growth measurement will ultimately be expanded across the teaching force, with an immediate priority on grades K-3 and secondary math, science, social studies, and English.
2. *Proficiency in Job-Related Performance Standards:* Administrators and impartial subject-area experts will assess teachers on research-based performance standards during a series of classroom observations to occur over the course of each school year. Because an evaluation system must not just determine compensation but also drive professional growth, teachers with low proficiency ratings will receive Individual Growth Plans outlining targeted, individualized support to be provided by an impartial subject-area expert in areas of professional need.
3. *Support of Special Education:* In order to promote a culture of accountability among all teachers for meeting the needs of our special education students, we will assess both special education and general education teachers on fulfillment of special education responsibilities, such as attendance at IEP meetings.
4. *Professionalism:* In the current evaluation system, a teacher may earn a zero on professionalism and still receive an Exceeds Expectations rating. We will make professionalism a meaningful part of the evaluation system, measuring fulfillment of such responsibilities as timeliness in reporting to duty, compliance with policies and procedures, and respectfulness in interactions with other members of school community.
5. *School-Level Goals:* Each school will choose three school-level goals from a menu to be developed by the Office of Data and Accountability, including items such as increased proficiency levels, increased attendance rate, decreased suspension rate, decreased rate of teacher absenteeism, or increased graduation rate. The school's rate of success at reaching these goals will be reflected on each educator's evaluation, in an effort to foster a collective sense of accountability for the school's success.

6. *Content Knowledge (for pilot purposes only in SY 2009-2010)*: This component will be designed to measure the extent to which educators have the requisite knowledge to fulfill their instructional responsibilities.

D. *Develop a dramatically improved compensation system.*

In collaboration with the Washington Teachers' Union, we plan to design an individual pay-for-performance compensation schedule based on quantitative and qualitative assessments of performance. To improve teaching performance, it is crucial to increase the performance mindset among teachers. And that performance mindset depends crucially on a clear signal of accountability: outstanding performance will be met with outstanding rewards, and less-than-outstanding performance will be rewarded less generously.

We will also reward teachers with greater compensation if they work in a high-needs school and demonstrate their effectiveness in those schools ("high-needs" defined by percentage of students on free and reduced lunch).

This performance-based compensation system builds in part off of the success of our school-level performance awards (known as the TEAM award), launched with great success in 2007. All employees—from the principal to the custodian—in schools that made outstanding gains in student achievement were rewarded with substantial bonuses, ranging up to \$10,000 for the principals and \$8,000 for the teachers. We plan to continue to reward schools (including all employees) for gains in proficiency on standardized assessments. To do this, we will increase the amount of the current TIF grant to further incentivize schools to improve student performance and apply for foundation funds for non-instructional staff bonuses. These school-level bonuses will continue to be implemented in 2008-09, and will possibly extend into future years, as our individual-level performance pay system ramps up.

E. *Enhance external teacher recruitment and develop "homegrown" teacher pipeline.*

Our recruitment engine must fill an unprecedented number of vacancies with a higher quality of candidate than in past years. Collaboration with The New Teacher Project is providing a strong pipeline of candidates, and we plan to expand that program. We will also maintain our strong partnership with Teach For America, which has provided many strong teachers over time. We also have reason to believe that if we are able to implement pay-for-performance, many more new teachers of the right mindset will be attracted to DCPS.

However, we can also do more to improve our selection mechanism to ensure the hiring of high-quality teachers. First, we must streamline certification to reduce the number of high-quality candidates who today are identified and selected but not ultimately hired. Second, we will initiate efforts to bring small cohorts of teachers of high caliber to DCPS, through, e.g., pursuing pension portability for out-of-state teachers so that they will not lose any accumulated benefits; recruiting high-performing teachers from local districts to work at new DCPS schools; and providing formal opportunities for new cohorts of high-caliber teachers to share experiences and best practices.

F. *Remove poor performers.*

While DCPS has many dedicated and outstanding teachers, we have not focused enough in the past on hiring strong candidates or insisting on strong results. As a result, there continue to be too many teachers who are performing at unacceptable levels. We believe that many of these teachers have the basic skills and desire to improve, and will be able to do so through more intensive professional development programs focused on boosting student achievement.

But we also must face an uncomfortable reality: some of our teachers are not willing to commit to the demands job of educating our youth effectively, or are not able to improve on the timeline that our students deserve. We therefore plan to identify and transition out a significant share of the teaching corps in the next two years. Some teachers will be offered the option of being “bought out” of their contracts, as described below. We will also aggressively exercise the option not to renew teachers who are in provisional status, ensuring that those teachers who are not performing effectively exit the system before they achieve tenure. Principals are being asked for the first time to systematically identify those provisional teachers who have not demonstrated the potential to grow into highly effective teachers.

Principals, who have the most accurate picture of classroom effectiveness, will be asked to play a central role in identifying low performers. They will also be given additional support in how to meaningfully evaluate performance and will have access to central “helping teachers” to work with our lowest performers. We will provide workshops to make sure that principals understand the legal requirements of hiring and dismissal of employees. We will also clarify the incentives principals have for transitioning out poor performers, including school-based performance rewards.

G. *Develop buy-out program to facilitate teacher exit.*

Our transformation will ask many teachers to fundamentally re-think their role. They will be asked to adopt new instructional approaches and to use data in decision-making in the classroom in ways they may never have done before. Some may not wish to make these adjustments and will prefer instead to leave DCPS. In recognition of this, we developed a buy-out program calibrated to years of service. The first buy-out offer was extended in the spring of 2008 to teachers at retirement age and those in schools that were closing or being restructured, as per NCLB. Approximately 350 teachers took advantage of this offer. In the future, we will consider extending buy-out offers to excess teachers who are released from their school budgets due to declining enrollment or a change in the academic program, but cannot find placements at other schools.

## Principals

### H. *Aggressively recruit experienced, proven leaders from external sources*

Leading a school is an exceptionally challenging role, so attracting strong principals is a critical objective. Too few of DCPS's current principals have experience leading successful school turnaround efforts, and too few are equipped with the operational and instructional skills that are core to their performance. We will therefore seek to attract strong instructional leaders with proven managerial and operational experience. This recruitment will begin by identifying high performers from outside of the DCPS system based on networking in selected areas, national website postings, and non-local city papers. We will also work with principal development programs and foundations to recruit non-local candidates with strong leadership potential who reflect the local population.

### I. *Create a new DCPS School Leadership Academy.*

In order to equip principals with the core skills they will need to be successful school leaders, and in order to develop our own principal pipeline, we will open a School Leadership Academy. The Academy will train new principals through a series of simulated school projects that reflect the realities of the settings in which they will work. The offerings of the academy will be explicitly aligned with the Effective Schools Framework, which in turn aligns with the principals' performance evaluation. The induction phase of principals' training will focus on the basic operational and managerial skills needed to effectively run a school, as well as introduction of the school report card to which principals and their schools will be held accountable. On an ongoing basis, the Academy will provide additional training modules, with a focus on instructional leadership skills and exposure to experiences including observing, participating in, and leading teachers to improve classroom practice.

The Academy will also ultimately provide training and certification opportunities for promising principal candidates from within and outside of the system. We'll explore the possibility of partnering with regional universities after performing an audit of the quality of the program and alignment with DCPS curriculum.

### J. *Launch a new performance management system.*

As in the case of teachers, we will introduce a new performance evaluation for principals that reflects the priority on improving student outcomes. The evaluation will be aligned with the Effective Schools Framework (which in turn is aligned with the professional development program for principals).

### K. *Define and roll out a career ladder.*

We also plan to create a career ladder for principals, with the same purpose and basic elements as that for teachers. The career ladder will help to promote new principal development pathways by initiating principal apprenticeship and mentoring programs for teachers and assistant principals. Outstanding principals may be promoted to "expert" status, rewarding them in financial and non-financial ways based on

performance. We would also draw upon the group of outstanding current and past principals to teach at the new DCPS School Leadership Academy.

L. *Assess options for developing a pay-for-performance compensation system.*

In future years, we plan to explore the possibility of creating an individual pay-for-performance compensation schedule based on quantitative and qualitative assessments of performance. Elements could include:

1. *An increase in base compensation by \$5,000-\$10,000 for novice/beginning principals and \$15,000-\$20,000 for veteran principals (only applicable to those who opt-in to the pay-for-performance plan)*
2. *Quantitative data systems to measure value-added student achievement*
3. *Qualitative assessments that will take the form of peer and parent evaluations of coaching, professional development, student engagement, and community outreach*
4. *A greater performance-based bonus if a principal works in a high-needs school ("high-needs" defined by percentage of students on free and reduced lunch)*

## **Central Office Staff**

M. *Launch an aggressive recruitment campaign.*

An assessment of existing central office hiring practices has revealed that we have not generated enough high-quality applicants for job positions in the past. This has created an opportunity to boost our marketing strategy. We plan to expand the scope of current hiring strategy to a variety of different job boards, not just the DCPS website. This outreach is designed to build talent pools for departments through targeted recruiting, for instance through web postings on popular and widely used job information websites, and advertisements in educational association news magazines. We will also explore the possibility of creating a Teacher-Central Office Administration Fellows program, rotating teachers on summer break into central office capacities.

N. *Write clear, detailed job descriptions for all positions to align performance management and compensation.*

O. *Create a performance management system that evaluates, develops, recognizes, and rewards DCPS central office staff.*

We began this process by administering performance evaluations to everyone in the central office, many of whom had not had any formal evaluation for years. The next stage of this process is to refine our evaluation tool to reflect simplified priorities that are aligned with our theory of change. We have developed the first iteration of this tool and expect to continue to develop it. Coupled with the evaluation tool itself will be an ongoing professional development process with managers, norming the tool across the organization and equipping managers with strategies for effective conversations with staff about goal-setting and performance.

P. *Build the central office staff capacity to achieve transformation initiatives.*

The program will motivate staff to examine their values, align their actions with DCPS's six Core Beliefs, and take advantage of opportunities to grow in their positions. Activities will be focused around three areas of need:

1. *Central Connection:* Staff will hear from the chancellor's leadership team about how the daily work of their respective departments relates to student needs, learning outcomes and overall achievement. Staff will also interact with external panels of parents, teachers, students, and non-profit organizations that are able to speak to the needs and challenges of students in DCPS.
2. *Central Capacity:* Staff will build the capacity to better serve constituents by capitalizing on opportunities to enroll in year-round courses on workplace fundamentals, management and leadership. Opportunities will include classes and online coursework offered by the Workforce Development Administration (WDA), seminars from non-profits and other external providers, and DCPS-specific classes offered by the chancellor's cabinet members and staff.
3. *Central Community:* Staff will create and engage in communities of learning and support to bolster their development, building relationships with people across different departments at the central office through interactive and social activities. Programming will include book clubs on urban education reform, outside community service activities, and a regular central office Open House.

Measure the effectiveness of the program and re-tool based on metrics including course satisfaction surveys of central office staff, rates of participation in programming, and performance assessment data.

Q. *Assess and refresh the compensation system.*

To enhance the attractiveness of coming to work at DCPS and boost incentives for good performance, we also plan to assess our current compensation structure with an eye toward developing a partial pay-for-performance system for central office staff. We expect to begin with a 10 percent bonus to reward the top 10 percent of performers.

### III. Aligned Curriculum

Many of the challenges DCPS now faces stem from a diffused sense of purpose among those responsible for carrying out its goals. This problem is separate from talent and motivation. Even the most talented, passionate, and hardworking people in DCPS can find their efforts made ineffectual when the district lacks common goals, a shared purpose, and an aligned direction. This is especially true when it comes to instruction – the core work of the school district. Without a unified framework for success at the classroom, school, and district levels, it is impossible to align resources to effectively support the work of students, teachers, and school leaders.

The initiatives in this focus area are intended to create the alignment that can remedy this problem. In this section we take a closer look at what our academic vision is and what it takes to achieve our vision.

#### **WHERE WE STARTED: *A Snapshot as of Early 2008***

Teachers in DCPS are currently pursuing widely divergent approaches to classroom instruction. While there must always be room for teacher innovation and personal style, the lack of unified expectations at the classroom and school levels creates significant challenges on a number of fronts.

- ¶ In the critical area early literacy, the range of teachers' instructional philosophies reflect different levels of training and experience with research-based practice. At best, this cacophony of philosophies and practices makes it extremely difficult for DCPS to effectively support the work of instructional staff. At worst, many of our teachers and even schools are headed in a direction that lessens their chances of making significant gains in student achievement.
- ¶ Without a shared understanding of instructional goals and effective practices, our effort to support teachers' work centrally is diluted, forcing each school to "reinvent the wheel" at the school site, rather than benefiting from a developed central knowledge base.
- ¶ Lack of clarity around expectations for instruction weakens the effectiveness of any accountability systems for teachers.

While DCPS has committed in the past to preparing its students for college and work, the systems to support that goal have not been aligned.

- ¶ Little attention has been paid to whether students are on track to graduate and, of not, what measures must be taken urgently.
- ¶ There is no broad, systemic approach to ensuring that all students are actively considering college and career options.



Out-of-school time has not been aligned with what is happening during the school day, so students are not able to leverage that time to receive targeted extra support academically.

### **WHAT WE HAVE ACCOMPLISHED: *Progress as of Early 2009***

Over the past year, we have moved towards alignment in important ways, including the following activities:

- ¶ Rolled out the Effective Schools Framework that simply and explicitly lays out what we see as universally critical to the development and operation of effective schools within DCPS.
- ¶ Aligned our monthly Principal Leadership Academy to the Effective Schools Framework.
- ¶ Established full-time after-school coordinators at most of our schools, with the explicit purpose of aligning what happens during the regular school day with the after-school program.
- ¶ Launched BURST, which provides teachers with targeted lesson plans and materials for students whose regular DIBELS early literacy assessments indicate needs in specific skill areas.
- ¶ Piloted “anchor assignments” at a set of middle and high schools. By using a standard “anchor assignment” prompt and rubric across classrooms and schools, teachers are able to benchmark their expectations of students, their students’ work product, and their own instructional practice.
- ¶ Provided centralized training for all school-based professional developers, increasing consistency and quality across schools through sharing of best practices and alignment with research-based strategies.
- ¶ Established online accounts for all high school students where they can develop Individual Graduation Plans (IGPs). By aligning their past academic work with DCPS requirements, specific post-secondary requirements, and their own career and academic interests, IGPs will increase students’ ability to achieve their goals.
- ¶ Initiated end-of-course tests in algebra and biology, to ensure alignment of expectations and outcomes for these traditional “gatekeeper” classes.

### **WHERE WE WANT TO BE: *Instructional alignment around a focused and demanding set of standards***

DCPS’s theory of change for alignment is that when instructional methods and materials, assessments, data systems, and professional development are designed to work in concert with, and in support of, a set of well-defined content standards, the instructional process in schools will be more effective and student achievement will increase. In the ideal case, these elements interact in a relatively straightforward way:

- ¶ The **content standards** contain a comprehensive description of what students should know and be able to do, for every grade and subject. These should be clear, focused, and reflect high expectations for student achievement.
- ¶ The actual **instruction** that occurs in the classroom uses methods designed to enable students to master the standards, based on research-based methods, wherever possible.
- ¶ **Instructional programs and materials** explicitly reference the content standards, and are designed to promote mastery of them.
- ¶ **Assessments** are constructed such that they diagnose which standards students have mastered and which they have not, and they are the primary source of data.
- ¶ **Data systems** are built to track performance against standards, and are used by teachers to tune their instructional approach, down to the individual student level.
- ¶ **Professional development** is used to familiarize teachers with the standards themselves, as well as to build their capacity to effectively use tools, assessments, and data in support of standards-based instruction.

By aligning these elements, we simultaneously create a unified instructional philosophy based in research, and increase our ability to support the work of instructional staff through focusing our centralized resources.

## HOW WE WILL GET THERE

Our plan for achieving this vision begins with standards and the procedures for aligning the remaining elements with those standards. We began by developing and rolling out the Effective Schools Framework, which defines the elements that all schools must incorporate to be successful. From there, we will extend the alignment process to the classroom level – including what effective instruction looks like, how we assess students, and how we professionally develop teachers with all of the above in mind.

A. *Create tools to translate the content standards into standards-based instruction that is focused and captures high expectations for its student achievement.*

### 1. *Develop and roll out a common Teaching and Learning Framework.*

When it comes to increasing student achievement, we know that effective instruction is at the core of student learning. The DCPS Teaching and Learning Framework will provide district-wide direction and guidance for standards-based classroom instruction and assessment. The Framework will offer a strategic way of thinking for teachers and school leaders to plan and execute effective standards-based instruction. This is not a curriculum or a prescriptive approach, but it clearly defines expectations for teachers that they can apply directly to classroom practice. By aligning professional development, training, and coaching to the Framework, DCPS will systemically and strategically support the delivery of effective standards-based instruction; the creation of engaging, safe, and

productive classroom learning environments; and the building of relationships to engage and invest students in learning.

2. *Focus on early literacy, and begin tiered reading interventions at all grade levels.*

Although the upper grades and other subjects are also important, a greater focus on early reading and writing instruction can be supported by at least three strong arguments. First, there is a relatively solid body of knowledge about what works in early reading instruction – namely, a focus on phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension – in order to lay a foundation for all students’ reading by the third grade. Second, there is evidence that improved reading and writing ability has positive effects on a child’s proficiency in other subjects. Third, improved reading proficiency could reduce subsequent special education referrals that are mostly based on reading difficulties.

The focus on early reading will be achieved by highlighting those standards that relate to fundamental reading skills, and prioritizing that subset of standards in each of the initiatives described below. DCPS has already identified a series of reading interventions that target particular categories of students, from those that need intensive intervention to those that need increased practice to accelerate progress. Teachers will be trained in identifying students who require the various levels of intervention and in utilizing the materials and instructional approaches effectively.

3. *Realign our career and technical program offerings to meet student demand for career development opportunities as well as to ensure academic rigor.* DCPS understands the importance of career development as a means to improve student achievement and prepare students for the rigor and demands of post-secondary opportunities. A new, comprehensive and holistic Career Pathways Program will be developed to:

- (a) *Align DCPS career and technical offerings to the D.C. Workforce Development plan and local labor market trends.*
- (b) *Align curricula within each field around industry-approved skill standards and core academic standards, to ensure that students leave prepared for both workforce and postsecondary success.*
- (c) *Ensure that Career Pathways coursework leads to national, industry-approved certification or licensure.*
- (d) *Work with college and university partners to provide Career Pathways students with articulation certifications that guarantee college credit for Career Pathways coursework.*
- (e) *Increase student enrollment and parent involvement in Career Pathways programming by conducting outreach through a system-wide career day, middle school career fairs, monthly high school Career Academy open houses, and industry partner-sponsored parent workshops.*

- (f) *Provide career and technical education offerings at a wide range of high schools, including both comprehensive high schools and citywide selective high schools.*
  - (g) *Establish a parent advisory board to solicit feedback on Career Pathways strategic planning and to draft a Parent Handbook on Career Pathways offerings.*
4. *Create a standard description of DCPS's graduation requirements, and which courses count toward them.*

The District of Columbia Municipal Regulations set the requirements for students to receive a diploma from District of Columbia public and charter schools. The role of DCPS is to design and implement policies and procedures to ensure that students meet these requirements. Currently, the graduation requirements – including which courses fulfill which specific requirement – are not well understood by school counselors and students. As a result, schools have not consistently implemented the official course credit guidelines for fulfilling requirements, causing students to accrue credits in a non-standard way. This results in confusion about who is qualified to graduate and what courses students need to be scheduled for in order to fulfill their requirements. The costs of this confusion are substantial. First, students who receive inaccurate counseling suffer directly insofar as they may graduate without the sufficient preparation to which they are entitled. Second, other students in the system suffer indirectly as well, as the reputation of a DCPS diploma is diminished by inconsistency. Third, this kind of general disorder is disheartening to the system's best teachers, because the system they rely on to provide them with support is unable to offer even the most basic information they need to properly serve students.

Achieving this goal will require several steps, including:

- (a) *Revise and update the high school course catalog and produce an Academic Course Guide for students, parents and educators that clearly lays out what courses are offered in high schools and which courses fulfill specific graduation requirements.* This information will also be available on the DCPS website and in the student portal of DC STARS.
- (b) *Publicize efforts to revamp the policies, procedures and guidance.* Launch professional development to educate school staff.
- (c) *Develop consequences for school staff who fail to follow the graduation policies, procedures and guidance.*
- (d) *Implement Individual Graduation Plans (IGPs) for all high school students, one component of which is an Individual Courses Plan (ICP), where students in 8th grade map their full high school pathway to graduation.* ICPs are to be updated twice yearly to account for any changes and ensure adjustment to future schedules.

Besides the time and resources required to do the work of cleaning up the graduation policies, procedures, and guidance documents, the largest challenge in this initiative will be to ensure that these policies, procedures and guidance documents become widely understood. Toward this end, the owners of this initiative in Curriculum and Instruction will need to work closely with the Professional Development Office, which coordinates staff education efforts, and the Office of Data and Accountability, where the information is captured.

5. *Align afterschool program offerings with students' instructional and developmental needs.* Afterschool programming offers students critical opportunities not only to receive enrichment through arts, culture, health, and wellness activities, but also to receive academic assistance, extend the school day, and complete courses they need to be on-track for promotion or graduation. For this reason, all afterschool programs at DCPS will be integrated into a single comprehensive initiative, with dedicated full-time coordinators, to:
  - (a) *Ensure that afterschool providers fulfill specific minimum requirements and have been appropriately matched to the needs of students and schools.*
  - (b) *Ensure that afterschool providers understand and are held to rigorous standards of practice, including:*
    - (i) appropriate tracking of attendance;
    - (ii) adherence to the program design outlined in their applications to provide service at DCPS;
    - (iii) regular solicitation of student and parent feedback, and revision of program design in response to student and parent feedback; and
    - (iv) maintenance of program quality, as demonstrated through regular on-site evaluations and annual reporting requirements.
  - (c) *Support afterschool providers in meeting the standards of practice by providing them with technical assistance and/or direction to the appropriate resources.*
  - (d) *Establish an "Academic Power Hour" at the elementary and middle school levels to provide students with academic assistance in areas of need, as indicated by achievement data, as well as enrichment through arts, culture, health and wellness activities.*
  - (e) *Expand afterschool programs at all high schools to include academic, enrichment and wellness activities.*
  - (f) *Expand afternoon credit recovery programs to all high schools, offering students the opportunity to extend their school day and complete the courses they need to be on-track for promotion or graduation.*
  - (g) *Offer online, for-credit courses to high school students with guidance from a trained staff.*

- (h) *Track attendance of all students enrolled in afterschool programs through DC-STARS (including school-sponsored clubs, sports, credit recovery courses, tutorials, etc.).*

B. *Refine formative student assessments so that they map directly to the standards and provide effective diagnostic and formative data.*

Though the DC-CAS and DC-BAS are aligned with the DC-CAS instruction guide, teachers lack other aligned assessments to use during the school year to monitor student progress. In addition, students and their families have no means by which to gauge progress in mastering the standards.

1. *Promote an understanding of the content standards among students and families.*  
Students and parents will have access to the content standards, ensuring that expectations for assignments are clear for students before, during, and after student output.

Standards and assessments are the way that educational systems describe what students need to learn. These tools become more effective the more they are understood and shared. This fact extends beyond school staff to students and their families; when students and parents understand what is expected of them, they are better equipped to succeed.

However, giving families real access to assessments means more than simply publishing them on a website; assessments are likely to be incomprehensible without explanation. Therefore, this initiative ties to the efforts described in the Engagement focus area; one of the goals of parental outreach efforts will be to teach parents and students how to understand the standards, how to interpret test results, and what to do if the student is not progressing as he or she should.

2. *Develop a set of benchmark, short-cycle, and end-of-term assessments with explicit reference to the standards for all courses.*

Assessments can serve multiple purposes: to establish a baseline understanding of what students know at the beginning of the year, to measure progress at the end, and to provide mid-course corrections—in a non-punitive and non-evaluative way—for teachers and students along the way. DCPS will develop and make available distinct assessments for each of these purposes. In order to allow these assessments to work together, they will all be tied back to the DC-CAS standards.

These assessments will be tied to specific courses, so that every student will be measured with respect to every class that she or he takes, which is particularly helpful in grades and subject areas not currently tested by the DC-CAS.

3. *Revise the report card system for elementary school grades to ensure that they are standards-based and comprehensive; launch electronic report cards.*

Sparked by a group of teachers who recognized the difficulties in the current report cards, this effort will overhaul the report card system so that students, parents, and teachers can easily understand any student's status with respect to mastering the content standards. Electronic report cards will allow schools to

escape the burden of keeping large cumulative files for students, which are usually poorly organized, often incomplete and easily lost. At the early childhood level, report cards will explicitly recognize the developmental range that can be expected among young children of the same age, focusing on growth toward standards.

- C. *Use data to inform instruction, in part by using benchmark assessments and short-cycle assessments that teachers can use to continuously improve their teaching practices.*

The vision for use of assessments requires IT systems that, at the moment, do not exist. Chief among these is a student information system that can be used to track a student's progress from year-to-year and school-to-school. In addition, this ideal system would be able to produce an academic snapshot for any school, department, or classroom, showing how the progress of that unit compares to its peers. Building this system will need to be done in close collaboration with the owner of initiatives in the Data-Driven Decisions plan.

1. *Align data systems with content standards in the core academic subjects.*

A data system is only as useful as what is contained within it; this initiative is meant to ensure that, in addition to storing information like student grades and attendance, the system is also able to track the progress of a student in mastering the standards (or, conversely, the success of a teacher or school in teaching the standards).

2. *Continue to improve the implementation and effectiveness of the benchmark assessment program (DC-BAS), with the goal of creating a thriving benchmark assessment system that supports and informs quality instruction.*
3. *Make available tactical data on student achievement to teachers, who will be trained to adjust their day-to-day instructional practices based on the strengths and weaknesses that the data reflect.*

These two initiatives are the technology-focused counterparts to several other initiatives. For example, having a rigorous yearly benchmark test is one of the two requirements for being able to calculate a teacher's annual "value-added" (the other requirement is the year-end test—in this case the DC-CAS—that is used in concert with the benchmark to gauge the progress made that year). This work has already been initiated. We must ensure that the data generated by the short-cycle assessments mentioned are collected, and that teachers will be able to easily pull this information from their classroom computers. Unless data collection and access is made trivially easy, the value of developing excellent short cycle assessments will be severely limited because no one will use them.

4. *In the short term, use data from DC-CAS results to develop targeted interventions aimed at moving schools out of NCLB performance improvement status.*

DCPS's long-term vision is to use data to inform all instructional practices, and to have as the main goal the broad objective of lifting student achievement

throughout the district. However, in the near term, it makes strategic sense to focus attention on those schools and students that have been identified as not making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) according to NCLB.

We will comb the DC-CAS results and determine which students at which schools should be targeted first in order to lift schools out of needing improvement according to NCLB. Principals and teachers at those schools will develop programs to work with those students, and these programs will be aligned to the broader alignment strategy described in this document.

5. *Expand the use of the DIBELS early literacy assessment.*

Given the critical importance of identifying reading difficulties early and responding quickly, all K-3 teachers will utilize the DIBELS assessment to identify children at risk for reading failure and focus in on the particular skills they need to develop. Beginning in the 2009-2010 school year, all K-3 teachers will also complete the switch from paper-and-pencil DIBELS testing to wireless handheld testing. Through the use of handheld devices, teachers can analyze achievement data in real time and easily track students' progress over time.

DIBELS assessment occurs three times over the course of the school year – at the beginning of a student's school year, in the middle of the year, and at the end of his or her school year. For all students not meeting benchmark expectations, we will require biweekly progress monitoring. Progress monitoring ensures that classroom instruction is focused on the specific needs of individual students, and that necessary adjustments to promote student achievement are made in a timely fashion.

Finally, for our students most at risk for reading failure, we will follow progress monitoring with a reading intervention program called BURST, mentioned earlier. BURST provides item-level data-differentiated instruction based on each student's progress monitoring data. BURST technology analyzes student responses to each tested item and choreographs custom small-group lesson plans for the two-week period between progress monitoring re-testing.

6. *Develop end-of-course tests in core content areas at the high school level.*

To ensure consistent high standards across the district, we will develop assessments to gauge student achievement of rigorous academic objectives beginning with algebra and biology, and expanding to other core content areas.

D. *Create professional development programs that support teachers in delivery of effective standards-based instruction, the creation of engaging learning environments, and the importance of professional learning communities.*

Current professional development efforts are not tied to any unifying goal or philosophy. They tend to be one-off, isolated programs with no follow-up. Furthermore, PD programs often do not incorporate the findings of research that indicates that the best way for adults to learn is through repeated coaching and peer feedback, as opposed to receiving presentations.



Each of the elements of the alignment strategy will require dedicated PD time to familiarize teachers with the model. This work will be done largely by the Professional Development Office.

1. *Provide comprehensive professional development to support effective standards-based instruction in every classroom.*

By aligning professional development efforts to the DCPS Teaching and Learning Framework, DCPS will systemically and strategically support the delivery of effective standards-based instruction; the creation of engaging, safe, and productive learning environments; and the building of relationships to invest students in learning.

2. *Partner with the Washington Teachers' Union to establish "Teacher Centers" modeled after the program in New York City.*
3. *Focus instructional professional development on scientifically-based reading research.*

Reading research has identified five essential components that must be included in any reading program:

- (a) *Phonemic awareness—the ability to identify the individual sounds in spoken words*
- (b) *Phonics—knowledge of the relationships between the letters of written language and the phonemes sounds of spoken language*
- (c) *Fluency—the ability to read a text accurately and quickly*
- (d) *Vocabulary—knowledge of words and their meanings, both in spoken and in written form*
- (e) *Comprehension—the ability to make sense of written text*

4. *Ensure that all instructional PD is explicitly linked to the Teaching and Learning Framework, and in turn the Effective Schools Framework.*
5. *Follow up formal programs with coaching and job-embedded professional development around use of content standards.*
6. *Create continuous coaching program on data-driven inquiry.*
7. *Develop model lesson guides. Share common assignments.*

Where possible, successful lesson plans should be developed and shared through professional development programs. Professional developers are naturally suited to do this. They visit different classrooms, identify what's working well, share with each other, and share back to other teachers, thus cross-pollinating classrooms with the best ideas.

- E. *Develop a comprehensive DCPS Educator Performance Management Platform that serves the following core functions:*
1. *Manage the logistics of the performance management process (e.g., help administrators and teachers comply with deadlines through dashboard “alerts”).*
  2. *Serve as the repository of the DCPS Educator Performance Standards, along with accompanying rubrics and exemplars (e.g., videos of effective classroom practice, videos of high-performing educators reflecting upon their practice, PDFs of effective lesson plans, JPEGs of effective bulletin boards).*
  3. *Serve as the repository of evidence about teacher proficiency in the DCPS Educator Performance Standards (e.g., written notes by administrators, videos of actual classroom teaching, PDFs of student work).*
  4. *Serve as the repository of individual educator growth plans.*
  5. *Serve as the link to DCPS professional development opportunities.*
  6. *Facilitate communication between administrators and teachers, and between teachers themselves, about professional practice.*
  7. *Serve as the repository of teacher-level student achievement growth data (when available).*
  8. *Gather robust data on teacher performance and offer instructionally useful reporting mechanisms to a variety of stakeholders (e.g., teachers, administrators, Instructional Superintendents, the community).*
  9. *Link seamlessly with other data systems (e.g., PeopleSoft, EasyIEP).*

## IV. Data-Driven Decisions

By 2013 data will be used throughout DCPS, in all activities, to make informed decisions on how to better educate our students. Data will be at the fingertips of principals, teachers and parents in the form of easy-to-understand, actionable information. Armed with this information, teachers will be able to identify the strengths and weaknesses of each individual student and provide tailored instruction to meet each of their needs. School leaders will know which instructional programs and professional development courses are most effective and are the best investment of their resources. Parents will log-on to the web-accessible system to access school and student information and will be better equipped to provide their children with support and be involved in their education. And data will be used to hold DCPS staff accountable to the high standards we will set for student achievement.

We will reach this goal by focusing on three objectives: develop a clear accountability system at schools which is aligned with accountability systems throughout the rest of DCPS; develop and upgrade our student information and assessment data systems and then integrate them with other key data systems (e.g. HR, finance, special education) in a data mart; and provide supports to transform this data into actionable information that teachers and school leaders can easily use to improve student achievement.

What follows is a discussion of the current state of the DCPS data and accountability systems, a description of our aspirations for the future and an outline of the initiatives we will carry out to reach our vision. Following this, a timeline is presented to show when we will undertake each initiative over the next five years.

### **WHERE WE STARTED: *A Snapshot as of Early 2008***

In the summer of 2007, there were 27 individual data systems at DCPS. These systems communicate poorly with one another and the sparse data that is collected is often of poor quality. Furthermore, the data systems lack automation, and performing useful analyses, when possible, is extremely time consuming.

Without the proper tools to perform data-based decision-making, DCPS lacks the ability to perform many key functions. For example, schools and their instructional staff are not held accountable for the success of their students since insufficient data is available to evaluate schools. In addition, the effectiveness of instructional programs is unknown and thus best practices – and importantly, ineffective practices – cannot be identified. Even those analyses that can be performed require considerable effort and time. As an example, in order to assess the truancy rate in schools, an analyst must sort through over a thousand pages of output from the DC-STARS student information system, pull out individual summary sheets spread throughout the report and type in all data by hand into a spreadsheet to enable analysis. This takes days to perform and must be repeated every month.

Given the critical nature of data in driving accountability and its enormous potential to inform instruction, we have concluded that we must:

- ¶ Have a broad aspiration for our data and accountability systems: DCPS must cultivate a culture of data gathering, analysis, and fact-based decision-making and problem solving in support of increased student achievement.
- ¶ Design the comprehensive data system needed to achieve that aspiration – a system that gives disciplined attention not only to how DCPS gathers and processes data but also to ensuring that people understand and use that information to improve student achievement and their own performance.

#### **WHAT WE HAVE ACCOMPLISHED: *Progress as of Early 2009***

- ¶ Upgraded the DC-STARS student information system to vastly increase its speed and functionality.
- ¶ Cleaned data in STARS to ensure all high school juniors and seniors are correctly classified based on graduation requirements, and if not that they are quickly signed up for the appropriate classes to get them back on track.
- ¶ Utilized the above data to identify students who would be eligible to graduate, with the appropriate summer school course(s), resulting in over 400 students receiving their diplomas in August 2008.
- ¶ Administered stakeholder surveys to parent and school staff, assessing their satisfaction with a range of school level and district level programs and services.
- ¶ Initiated task force to develop School Scorecards.

#### **WHERE WE WANT TO BE: *Data-driven decision-making to enhance student achievement***

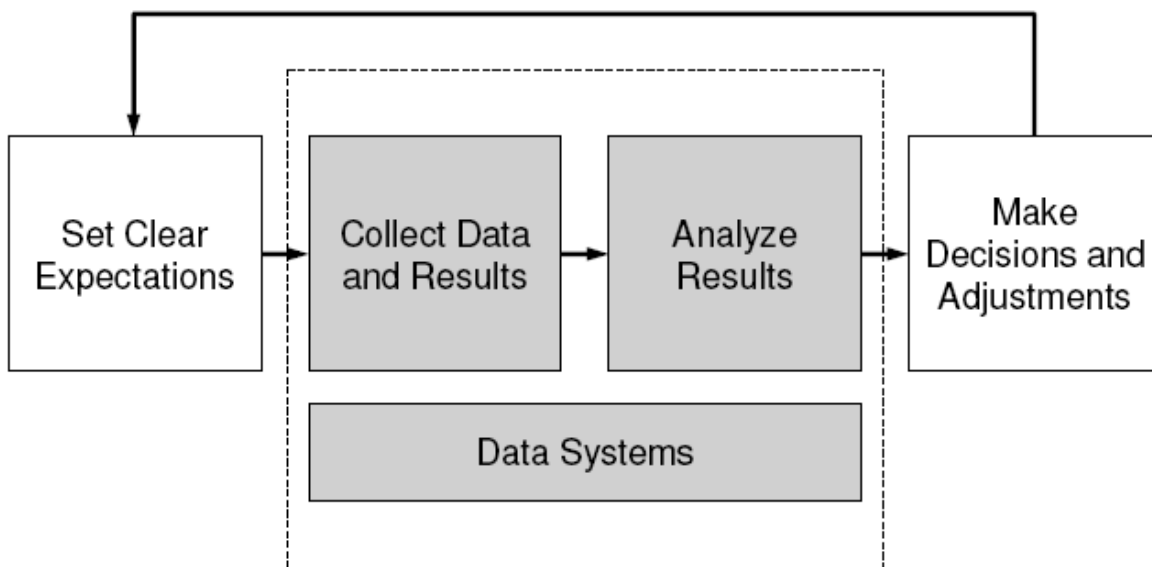
DCPS will use data to inform student instruction and decision-making, monitor the performance of individual schools and DCPS staff, and analyze resource allocation. To do this we first must bring our data systems to a level at which we can, at minimum, meet our accountability obligations. This includes submitting mandated data reports to state and national education agencies and other funders. Achieving this requires clarification of AYP accountability rules and communication of them to stakeholders involved in data collection and analysis. Once we have reached this baseline level of capability, we will then build the capacity to support data-driven decision-making by designing and implementing the ideal data and accountability systems that DCPS will use going forward. Importantly, these data systems will be efficient by incorporating a high level of automation and will provide information to all users in a manner that is easy to understand and actionable.

Data can be used in two ways to enhance student achievement. One way is to use assessment data to directly inform instructional choices. Our vision is that all school instructional staff will

use data continually to make better-informed decisions on how to support student learning. This aspiration comes alive when we consider the following examples of how data will be used throughout DCPS:

- ¶ Small groups of teachers regularly meet to review student data and share techniques. By comparing the results from a common assessment, they determine that one of them is most successful in meeting a particular objective. In the following days the other teachers observe this instructor's class and integrate the successful methods into their own lessons.
- ¶ A principal analyzes formative assessment data and identifies several students who are struggling in math. He modifies their schedules to place them into a separate intensive math course before they fall any further behind.
- ¶ DCPS collaborates with the research community to assess the success of its students in post-secondary educational institutions. They determine that relative to students from other districts, DCPS graduates – even those that excelled in secondary school assessments – do poorly in certain math courses. Researchers determine the areas of weakness in the DCPS secondary school math instruction and DCPS high school math curriculum and instruction are modified accordingly.
- ¶ Parents log on to the DCPS website and obtain information about the types of programs offered at nearby schools and their performance track records. Having this data, they choose an appropriate school based on their preferences and the specific needs of their children.

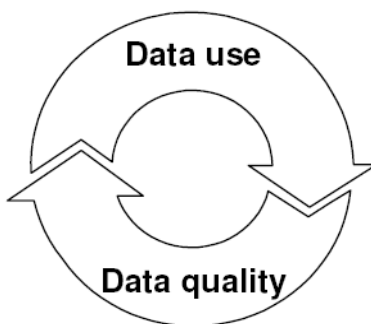
## DATA-DRIVEN DECISION-MAKING AND ACCOUNTABILITY



The second way data can be used to improve student achievement is to hold teachers, principals and schools accountable to high standards. The collection and analysis of data – enabled by the data systems – is the engine that drives this accountability process. Data allows for transparent evaluation of performance against the expectations that have been set. Thus, using data, we will be able to identify those schools and school staff that are not living up to our expectations, and take the appropriate action to correct the situation and enhance student achievement.

## HOW WE WILL GET THERE

Over the next 5 years, we will be creating the comprehensive data system needed to achieve this aspiration of a culture of data-driven decision-making. As noted earlier, that system will give disciplined attention not only to how DCPS gathers and processes data but also to ensuring that people understand and use that information to improve their own performance and enhance student achievement. We will build the data and accountability systems by engaging all stakeholders in the process. Developing methods to ensure the collection of accurate and reliable data will be a critical step. Then we will enable data use by providing all stakeholders with the appropriate training and by making data easy to use with customized dashboards and simple reports.



It is important to note that data use promotes the collection of higher quality data. Schools that use data to drive decision-making have a vested interest in ensuring that the data is accurate and reliable.

In order to achieve our goal of creating a data system to lay the foundation for improved instruction and accountability, we will carry out the following three objectives:

- A. *Design and implement a coherent, clear accountability system.*
  - 1. *Lay the foundation for the aligned accountability system.*
    - (a) *Set expectations at all levels within schools (e.g. teachers, principals, counselors, schools); this will include developing a set of metrics at each level and clear targets.*
    - (b) *Identify and assign responsibility for delivering metrics; this will include developing efficient data collection and reporting systems, which is described in the next objective.*

- (c) *Develop scorecards based on the expectations set; scorecards will be used as a simple tool to show performance in each metric relative to the target.*
- (d) *Design performance evaluation forms that are informed by the scorecards and summarize overall performance.*
- (e) *Define a set of actions to address shortcomings if expectations are not met, and reward excellence if expectations are exceeded.*
- (f) *Develop performance evaluation meetings as a setting to review performance and make appropriate decisions on actions to take.*
- 2. *Revise and improve the accountability system.*
  - (a) *Continually revisit expectations and consequences.*
  - (b) *Refine the accountability tools (scorecards, performance evaluations, data systems) to make the system more efficient.*
- B. *Place high-quality information at the fingertips of the DCPS community.*
  - 1. *Define the set of critical data that needs to be collected to evaluate and accelerate the progress of students and schools.*
    - (a) *Engage top DCPS instructional leadership in identification of top data needs.*
    - (b) *Based on these discussions, generate the list of the critical data that must be collected.*
    - (c) *Prioritize data needs and develop a timeline for data availability.*
  - 2. *Clean the current student data set and ensure proper data collection going forward.*
    - (a) *Assess the accuracy and consistency of the student data and collaborate with stakeholders at schools to determine the root causes of data errors*
    - (b) *Provide all stakeholders at schools with professional development on good data collection methods and written protocols that establish the proper method of data collection; this includes ensuring the confidentiality of student information.*
    - (c) *Where necessary, equip schools and the central office with the proper IT infrastructure to enable accurate and reliable data collection.*
    - (d) *Require schools to generate reports in which the accuracy of each piece of student information is determined, and necessary changes are made by school staff, and have principals sign off on the validity of the data in the reports.*
    - (e) *Provide intensive professional development to school staff to increase the use of the student information system (DC STARS) and the Office of the State*

*Superintendent of Education's special education data system (SEDS); this will ensure that more staff are inputting accurate student data into the systems.*

3. *Develop and upgrade the student information and assessment data systems and create a simple, customized portal for data access.*
  - (a) *Identify and engage key users of data; this list includes school leaders, teachers, central office staff and leadership, students, parents and other outside parties (e.g. research community, foundations, community leaders); based on discussions with key stakeholders, determine the required set of analysis and reporting capabilities needed for each user.*
  - (b) *Work with technical consultants to perform a diagnostic analysis of the current data systems and determine their ability to provide the required functionalities (either as is, or with improvements such as additional modules).*
  - (c) *Take steps to implement the comprehensive data system, either by expanding and improving upon on DC STARS or purchasing a new system from an external vendor.*
  - (d) *Upgrade the IT infrastructure at schools to enable teachers and principals to access the data system; this requires a networked computer in every classroom.*
  - (e) *Create computer-based tutorial programs that school and central office staff can use to familiarize themselves with the use of the data portal and its reports.*
  - (f) *Create a single portal through which principals and teachers can access all data systems.*
  - (g) *Create data dashboards that are customized to each user group (principals, teachers, etc); these user-friendly interfaces will provide each group with targeted information to enable data-based decisions to improve student achievement.*
  - (h) *Create electronic elementary report cards in DC STARS.*
  - (i) *Provide parents with online access to a system that allows them to stay informed about the ongoing performance of their child.*
  - (j) *Provide parents with information about each school to allow them to make informed decisions about which school to place their child in and have a better understanding of the school's performance relative to others.*
4. *Develop a data mart to integrate the student, HR and finance data systems.*

Data driven decision-making should extend beyond classroom-level instructional decisions to include broader cost-benefit analyses of the various programmatic approaches across the district. We want to be able to answer such questions as which professional development programs result in the most significant and



efficient change in student outcomes, or which sources of new teachers are producing our most effective teachers. All critical DCPS data will be integrated into a user-friendly data mart, which will put relevant, fresh, analytically useful information into the hands of DCPS decision-makers.

5. *Improve the data mart and expand the number of DCPS data systems that are integrated.*

Building the data mart will be a process that requires ongoing integration with systems from within DCPS and other agencies, including the Student Longitudinal Education Data (SLED) warehouse and Special Education Data System (SEDS) being developed by OSSE. We will work ongoing to ensure we are not reinventing systems but rather are maximizing the other systems that exist or are in development.

C. *Provide supports to transform data into actionable information.*

1. *Provide all staff with materials and training to empower them to effectively use data to advance student achievement.*
  - (a) *Disseminate written materials that define the basic use of data; include information on how to access and interpret reports, how to access additional data and whom to contact to for assistance.*
  - (b) *Provide ongoing professional development to teachers and principals on how to access data on the systems and how to use that data to inform student instruction.*
2. *Establish teacher “data leads” at each school as peer mentors.*
  - (a) *Collaborate with schools to identify teachers who are experienced in using data to inform their instruction.*
  - (b) *Enlist these teachers to become “data leads”; they will have the responsibility of mentoring others at their own schools in individual and small group settings.*
  - (c) *Provide these school “data leads” with additional professional development on the use of data and how to mentor others.*
3. *Create small teacher groups to provide support in the use of data.*
  - (a) *Teachers in each school will be divided into small teacher groups across subject type.*
  - (b) *These small groups will regularly meet to share experiences in data-driven decision-making and to help one another in using data and developing inquiries which identify improved instructional practices.*

4. *Analyze data to evaluate the effectiveness of school programs.*
  - (a) *Come to a consensus on the data analysis needs with top DCPS instructional leadership.* This will likely include value-added evaluations of professional development and instructional programs.
  - (b) *Prioritize the data analysis requests and perform a needs assessment to ensure that the appropriate data is collected in a manner that facilitates analysis.*
  - (c) *Hire additional data analysts within the Office of Data and Accountability to meet the analysis needs.*
  - (d) *Create processes to ensure communication of research findings and implementation of successful programs and practices identified by these analyses.*
5. *Actively engage the research community to help determine what schools, programs and specific practices enhance student achievement.*
  - (a) *Create streamlined, legal data sharing protocols that will give outside researchers access to DCPS data while maintaining student privacy.*
  - (b) *Generate an initial set of key research questions and engage the research community in answering them.*
  - (c) *Create roles within the Office of Data and Accountability to oversee the recruitment of researchers, perform collaborative data analysis and communicate the research findings to the DCPS community to improve performance.*

## V. Effective Central Office

In five years, the DCPS central office will be transformed from its current state. The budget will be balanced and sufficient funds will go to each school to ensure that they are staffed, well-resourced, clean and well-maintained. Teachers will get the classroom supplies they need and will get them quickly. In short, the central office will deliver on its sole duty of providing schools with the services they need to operate, and teachers and students will be able to devote their time and energy to teaching and learning – the things that truly matter.

To achieve this goal we will focus on improving four key central office functions. We will overhaul procurement processes so that supplies get to schools more quickly and at lower cost. We will enhance the efficiency of food services and improve the quality of school meals. We will bring more discipline and structure to financial planning to ensure that the recent budget deficits are not repeated again. In addition, we will develop performance management systems to ensure that central office staff is held accountable for the strategic initiatives in this document.

### **Improve efficiency and reduce costs in procurement.**

While rarely a top priority for school districts, procurement is a critical central office function. It is especially important for DCPS given the budgetary constraints we currently face and the host of programs we plan to institute to improve student achievement. Under these challenging circumstances, we have determined that we must work to fundamentally transform purchasing processes to decrease costs and provide supplies and services to schools more quickly and with less effort. Accomplishing this transformation will require significant effort on the part of all parties: customers (school and department leaders), the Office of Contracts and Acquisitions (OCA) and the Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO).

### **Enhance the efficiency of Food Services and the quality of school meals.**

DCPS will increase efficiency in Food Services by improving processes both at schools and the central office. The goal is to turn Food Services into a self-sufficient program that no longer relies on a local subsidy. More importantly, DCPS will upgrade food quality and increase student participation since good nutrition is essential to learning.

### **Bring more discipline and structure to financial planning.**

We seek to reverse the wasteful practices at DCPS by establishing responsible budgeting procedures. In doing so, we can ensure that sufficient resources reach schools and that there is adequate planning for funding of the transformation initiatives.

### **Develop aligned strategic planning, performance management, and project management systems for measuring and ensuring the success of transformation initiatives.**

An accountability system is essential to carry out a long term strategy for transforming the school system and improving student achievement. DCPS will develop such a system that enables us to evaluate progress by monitoring key metrics and the accomplishment of interim goals. Importantly, this system will allow for adjustment of the transformation strategy based on

changing availability of resources, progress of individual initiatives and effectiveness of programs. The keys to achieving this are the establishment of dedicated program management roles and processes within the Transformation Management Office (TMO) to oversee the transformation effort, improvements in data systems to assist in tracking initiative progress.

### **WHERE WE STARTED: *A Snapshot as of Early 2008***

Procurement at DCPS is currently an extremely inefficient process. The key stakeholders (customers, OCA and OCFO) do not work in harmony. As a result, significant time and money is wasted. What follows is a list of some of the major problems.

- ¶ Due to failures on the part of both contract specialists at the OCA and customers at schools and the central office, contracts are not monitored effectively.
- ¶ Purchasing of many supplies is not centralized or standardized, resulting in significant waste by not taking advantage of catalogue systems and aggregated spend. For example, until very recently, textbooks were ordered by each individual school through individual vendors.
- ¶ School and department leaders have inadequate knowledge of how to use procurement systems. Thus they experience frustration and waste both money and time (both theirs and that of procurement officers in the OCA).
- ¶ There is a pervasive ongoing practice of schools and programs entering into contracts with vendors without proper approval from the OCFO.
- ¶ There is inadequate procurement planning performed at schools and central office departments, which often leads to overspending.

The Food Services division at DCPS has been a troubled system faced with a multitude of challenges.

- ¶ Many families that qualify for free or reduced meals fail to fill out applications and food quality is poor. Thus student participation has been low, particularly at secondary schools.
- ¶ There have been inadequate systems at schools for tracking participation rates, and the processes at the central office for submitting reimbursement claims were inefficient. As a result, the food services division operated at a loss of over \$8 million annually.
- ¶ The quality of the food received low marks from students and families.

Due to present limitations, budgeting is currently performed year-by-year. This means there is little ability to do planning for long-term programs, let alone effective strategic planning. The limitations that currently preclude multi-year financial planning are:

- ¶ An ineffective payroll data system: up to 80% of individual payroll entries are inaccurate and there is currently no ability to track employees as they switch jobs within DCPS
- ¶ Inadequate level of budget forecasting within each department and at schools
- ¶ A host of issues that must first be resolved in the current budget

Ongoing strategic initiatives are currently tracked by the SchoolStat accountability program within the TMO. The SchoolStat director collects data on key metrics for each initiative, analyzes progress together with initiative owners and generates summary progress reports. Top DCPS leadership meets with strategic initiative owners to discuss progress in rotating weekly meetings. To maximize SchoolStat's value in supporting data-driven decision-making, there are several issues that must be addressed:

- ¶ Data relating to strategic initiatives is often of poor quality, making assessment of progress and development of corrective action steps difficult.
- ¶ There are inadequate processes in place to modify the strategic initiatives based on current progress, resource availability or changes in the strategic vision.
- ¶ There are inadequate processes in place to monitor spending on each initiative and link the progress in strategic initiatives with the budget.

#### **WHAT WE HAVE ACCOMPLISHED: *Progress as of Early 2009***

Several fundamental changes have taken place with respect to food services.

- ¶ Significantly increased our Free and Reduced Meal (FARM) application rate, setting us up to achieve Provision II status by 2010.
- ¶ Curtailed our historical loss on food service through contracting with an outside provider.
- ¶ Increased food quality at set of pilot schools.

We have taken some important strides in the arena of financial planning.

- ¶ Developed a 5 year financial forecast, with the support of outside experts.
- ¶ Begun to issue monthly budget to actual reports to all Chiefs, as a means to both increasing spending discipline and providing a check for the accuracy of financial tracking.

On the strategic planning front, we have moved towards greater alignment of planning and accountability systems.

- ¶ Our annual performance plan aligns with this Five Year Action Plan.
- ¶ Each Chief has a scorecard that aligns with the annual performance plan.
- ¶ Scorecards form the basis of regular SchoolStat sessions, which allow for problem solving around key issues, as well as accountability to goals.

**WHERE WE WANT TO BE: *A service-oriented central office that provides efficient, effective support to schools***

**Procurement**

Our vision is to transform the procurement organization into one whose primary goals are to provide better more efficient support to schools and to lower costs. To do this we will need to shift the mindset of all central office procurement staff to one that continuously strives to improve processes, provide better customer service and lower cost – total cost of ownership rather than simply purchasing cost. To do this we will also need to institute simplified and standardized procurement processes, effective data systems and rigorous governance procedures for contracts. DCPS customers will play their part as well. School and central office leaders will perform better financial planning by developing spending plans and instituting accountability systems to ensure correct purchasing procedures. By making these changes, we will significantly improve the experience of customers at schools. They will receive supplies more quickly and with less hassle. This will allow them to devote more of their attention to the students.

**Food Service**

Food quality and student participation will increase and the food services program will be financially self-sufficient. Additionally, we will implement Provision II in all schools over the next several years. Provision II is an option in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program that allows us to offer free meals to all students. Under Provision II, the amount of paperwork involved in monitoring participation is reduced, lowering administrative costs.

**Financial Planning**

DCPS will be a model of fiscal responsibility, ensuring that funds are directed at student instruction. To enable this we will have an accurate payroll system that accounts for each DCPS employee. Each department and school will perform budget forecasting together with the Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO). With multi-year financial forecasts in place, we will be in a better position to plan for and carry out our long-term strategic initiatives.

**Strategic Planning and Performance Management**

Our vision is to create an accountability program and initiative tracking system through which the transformation strategies can be rigorously monitored and updated. These systems will enable proper coordination of the interdependent strategies and resource allocation to ensure success. Achieving this will require evolving the Transformation Management Office into a

program management office that will exist for the life of the transformation plan. The TMO will provide additional project management capacity to each department; this is essential to ensure successful implementation of the initiatives, since these activities are above and beyond the day-to-day activities needed to simply operate schools.

The TMO will be responsible for monitoring the progress of each initiative together with individual work stream owners along the dimensions of time, budget and achievement of interim targets. The TMO will also facilitate identification and resolution of key issues that arise and will support top management target-setting and decision-making in response to the current project status. The SchoolStat accountability program will form the basis of the TMO, but with added responsibilities as well as improved data collection and reporting systems.

## **HOW WE WILL GET THERE**

To achieve this transformation in procurement, DCPS will undertake the following seven initiatives:

*A. Create a high-quality procurement team.*

- 1. Identify gaps in the current capabilities of the procurement team.*
- 2. Strengthen the skills of existing staff with focused training.* While detailed procurement policies exist, more training is needed to ensure that they are put to practice.
- 3. Develop the capabilities to perform total cost of ownership (TCO) analysis;* rather than focusing on only the purchase price, contract specialists will also consider shipping, warranty, internal business costs, etc. in vendor analysis.
- 4. Create a culture of data-driven decision-making within the OCA.*
- 5. Consider the feasibility of developing mandatory procurement rotation programs in which staff from other business units are assigned to purchasing.*
- 6. Consider bringing in procurement leaders from neighboring school districts for short stays to share and implement best practices.*

*B. Aggregate the spend to lower costs.*

- 1. Generate a list of the top 50 purchases throughout DCPS.*
- 2. For each of the top purchases, determine the number of vendors used and the size of the contract for each vendor.*
- 3. Based on this diagnostic, identify opportunities (e.g. where fragmentation exists) and prioritize them into several categories.*
- 4. Assign and deploy teams to develop sourcing strategies for individual supplies/services, starting with high priority items.*

5. *Institute clear procurement codes with policies for vendor negotiations including TCO analysis.*
- C. *Increase automation of procurement processes to reduce lead times.*
1. *Develop e-catalogues in PASS for current commodities that have long term contracts; these catalogues will automate the purchase of many supplies.*
  2. *Further identify processes that can be automated, standardized or performed more efficiently and develop strategies for accomplishing this.*
- D. *Create an electronic contracts database to facilitate more efficient management of contract awards.*
1. *Develop the contracts awards database that contains all contract information.*
  2. *Include functionality to enable searching/sorting of contracts and generation of custom reports.*
  3. *Develop protocols for using the database and updating it with new information; train stakeholders on how to use the database.*
  4. *Enhance the contracts awards database by adding functionality to automatically send e-mail alerts to customers and contract specialists when contracts are about to expire.*
- E. *Improve customer understanding of how to create spending plans and use procurement systems, and enforce accountability.*
1. *Create and distribute written policies and guidelines for the use of various procurement systems; there is currently a lack of understanding of the policies (and how they affect vendor selection) and lack of knowledge of the estimated lead times for receipt of supplies.*
  2. *Identify the root causes of the lack of customer proficiency in using procurement systems.*
  3. *Create cross-functional teams to provide targeted training to school and program leaders based on this analysis; the trainers will be from both the OCA and OCFO and will train customers on how to develop spending plans and how to properly use PASS and other procurement systems.*
  4. *Create a customer service desk at the OCA that will provide schools and departments with information on the status of their orders and general help with the purchasing process.*
- F. *Institute stricter policies for approval of contracts and enforce accountability.*
1. *Examine the current purchases and identify ones that were improperly processed (i.e. goods or services received without proper approval and written contracts).*



2. *Continue the ratification process for authorizing payment for these goods and services that were received without valid written contracts.*
3. *Create processes to ensure that the proper approval process is followed and that the costly and wasteful ratification process is avoided; this includes training customers at schools and the central office on the proper approval process for contracts and holding them accountable; this also includes creating punishments for those who do not abide by these rules.*

G. *Improve use of the AmEx BDA program.*

All schools have been equipped to participate in the American Express Buy Down Account (BDA) Program, which enables individual schools to purchase common school and office supplies on the internet. Those participating in the program report that most orders arrive within 48 hours. However, customers still don't fully understand how to properly use the program and participation can be expanded.

1. *Provide school principals and business managers with additional training to use the AmEx BDA program.* Specifically, customers should receive training on the process for setting up an account through PASS at the beginning of each year and for submitting receive reports to free up funds for each purchase.
2. *Continue working with the existing AmEx BDA vendors to add local distributors.*

An overhaul of food service will require these initiatives.

A. *Implement Provision II in schools*

1. *Work with OCTO to repair the computer infrastructure and install point-of-sale devices to accurately track student participation and accommodate the requirements for Provision II.*
2. *Improve the reimbursement process by upgrading the technical infrastructure at the central office and instituting a rigorous auditing process to ensure the accuracy of reimbursement claims.*
3. *Implement Provision II to reduce the reimbursement application and verification requirements and cut administrative costs.*
4. *Increase the number of free and reduced meal forms submitted by parents by launching an information campaign to make them aware of their qualification and of the enrollment process.*

B. *Upgrade the school kitchen infrastructure and revamp food offerings.*

Work with an external vendor to upgrade school kitchens with new equipment and to redesign the menu. Enhancing food quality will enable us to increase student participation.

We will achieve our goal of improving the budgeting processes at DCPS by carrying out the following three initiatives:

- A. *Upgrade the HR payroll system.*
  - 1. *Implement the PeopleSoft HR management system and train HR staff to use it.*
  - 2. *This includes updating all payroll records to accurately reflect who is working in each department.*
  - 3. *Develop processes within HR to accurately collect and update payroll data using the PeopleSoft system.*
- B. *Resolve issues with the current budget.*
  - 1. *The OCFO must first get ahead of the problem by resolving issues with the current budget. This includes getting a solid understanding of spending, department-by-department. It also involves rectifying mistakes made in past years that affect the current year budget.*
  - 2. *After getting on level ground, the OCFO can then focus its attention on making financial forecasts.*
- C. *Develop budget projections with department and school leaders and create multi-year financial forecasts.*
  - 1. *Provide school staff and leaders of central office departments with training in budget development and financial management.*
  - 2. *Develop teams of financial analysts who will work closely with department heads to cost individual strategic initiatives based on best estimates and make budget projections.*
  - 3. *Convene department heads with OCFO analysts to discuss the prioritization and sequencing of initiatives – based in part on the availability of financial resources – and determine unmet funding needs.*

As the owner of the strategic planning function, the Transformation Management Office serves to coordinate and hold departments accountable for the strategic initiatives. The following is a list of the primary TMO activities:

- A. *Provide strategic planning capacity.*
  - 1. *Coordinate across the organization to map out long term-strategy, and facilitate organization-wide engagement with and shared understanding of strategic plan.*
  - 2. *Drive the process of translating the long-term strategy into annual performance plans. Ensure high quality measures of success and targets are set on an annual basis – and that they reflect the articulated vision.*
- B. *Provide forum for senior leadership to communicate re strategic level initiatives.*
  - 1. *Ensure alignment with goals, and flag interdependencies through regular process of review and reflection.*

C. *Build performance management systems and support their establishment throughout the organization.*

1. *Measure progress against strategic and long-term goals and chief level scorecards.*
2. *Track progress and drive performance based, goal-driven culture via SchoolStat and initial development department level scorecards.*

D. *Establish home for cross cutting and fundamental change initiatives.*

1. *Incubate high priority strategic initiatives in TMO until they are ready to be infused throughout the organization or adopted by an operating team.*
2. *Coordinate selected cross-cutting and interdependent high priority strategic initiatives through a project management function.*

We envision that the TMO will initially play a significant role in aiding data collection, and enforcing accountability in both day-to-day activities and in implementation of strategic initiatives. However, over time the TMO staff will help build these capabilities within each department.

## VI. Engaged Community

Education is too important and too big a job for DCPS staff to handle alone. The success and sustainability of our overall reform plan depends on the engagement of all important stakeholders. **Students** themselves need to be engaged; without them, no intervention would succeed. **Parents**, if given access to the right information and tools for action, should become powerful partners in and advocates for their children's educational welfare. Finally, **community members who can offer time, resources, or dollars to the District**—including individuals, businesses, and other organizations—can provide the direct support necessary to realize DCPS's most ambitious goals.

To date, DCPS has not acted to engage these three groups in a coherent way. As a result, to a large extent, stakeholders are either not engaged with DCPS, or not engaged productively.

For example, parents, for the most part, do not have the information they need to be positively involved in the school system. Instead, they often view DCPS with suspicion and mistrust. In turn, DCPS staff can be mistrustful of parents and can fail to see them for what they are and can be—the primary directors of their children's education.

Similarly, although DCPS has the extreme good fortune to be located in one of the most culturally interesting and politically significant cities in the nation, to date we have failed to take full advantage of what DC as a city has to offer. Part of the reason for this failure is that it is just as difficult for organizations to navigate through the system as it is for parents. A well-intentioned institution with resources and a purpose that is looking to partner with a school may find it impossible to identify the right authorities to talk to, or may find that the administrative requirements (applications, screening) are too onerous. On DCPS's part, we have failed to articulate how partner institutions will play a productive role in increasing student achievement.

To realize its aspirations for the proper servicing and support of these groups, DCPS has created two new offices to address much of its engagement efforts – the Office of Family and Public Engagement and the Office of Community Partnerships. Below we will describe our clear aspirations and the myriad ways that DCPS will work to achieve those aspirations.

### **WHERE WE STARTED: *A Snapshot as of Early 2008***

- ¶ DCPS has no comprehensive record of which community groups were working in which schools.
- ¶ While some schools have robust parent groups, others have no established structures for parent involvement.
- ¶ The school district has no streamlined mechanism for matching up offers of help from community groups with schools that could benefit.
- ¶ Parents feel unwelcome in too many of our schools.

## WHAT WE HAVE ACCOMPLISHED: *Progress as of Early 2009*

- ¶ Launched Parent Resources Centers in Wards 1, 7, and 8, with significant programming at all three sites.
- ¶ Established multiple formal and informal opportunities for community engagement, including monthly Chancellor's Forums, additional city-wide community meetings, smaller living rooms meetings, and a group of parent advisors.
- ¶ Launched extensive community process for the redesign of Eastern High School.
- ¶ Expanded capacity of DCPS website to include multiple ways for parents and community can both receive information and provide feedback.
- ¶ Expanded corporate tutoring program.

## WHERE WE WANT TO BE: *The productive engagement of all stakeholders in DCPS*

Of the many community stakeholders that have an interest in DCPS (including lawmakers and the press), students, parents, and community partners have the greatest potential to most directly, and positively, impact student achievement. Set out below is what DCPS believes that productive engagement looks like, and what achieving it requires from the DCPS community:

The stakeholder...	...should play the role of...	...which requires ...
Student	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• An excited, productive member of a learning community</li><li>• The director of his or her own academic career (by having interests and expressing them)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• An understanding of the importance of academic success</li><li>• Confidence that he or she can succeed academically</li><li>• Knowledge of the resources available to him or her to support achievement</li></ul>
Parents and family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Advocates for their child's needs within schools</li><li>• Agents for "quality control" within the school portfolio</li><li>• Advocates for public school system</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• An understanding of how DCPS "works"</li><li>• Knowledge of the most important milestones of their child's academic career (e.g., standardized tests, high school course enrollment)</li><li>• Access to information on school performance</li></ul>
Broader community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provider of services and funding for special projects</li><li>• Supplier of additional adult role models and mentors for students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• An awareness that the entire community—even non-parents and businesses—benefits from high student achievement</li><li>• Many opportunities to easily "get involved"</li></ul>

When all parties have what they need to play their ideal roles, the ability of the system to increase student achievement is multiplied many times over.

## HOW WE WILL GET THERE

In order to achieve the vision of a system in which all stakeholders are productively engaged with DCPS, we are pursuing a set of initiatives that address each stakeholder group.

### A. *Increase students' engagement in their own academic success*

A school system that serves students effectively knows how to motivate and engage them toward higher levels of achievement each year. Quality instruction includes setting clear expectations that send a message that high achievement is not only possible but expected.

As our data systems improve, teachers will be able to give clear and ongoing feedback to students and parents about student progress. As a district, we will examine the incentives acting on our students, increase what works and weed out what does not. As we create a college-going culture across DCPS, students will be engaged and informed about the opportunities available to them and the steps they must take in order pursue those opportunities.

Specifically, we will:

1. *Offer academic options that match students' interests.*
  2. *Increase the use of Student Support Teams as an academic intervention to provide learning support to students.*
  3. *Continue to listen carefully to the members of the Chancellor's High School Cabinet.*
- B. *Share information with parents, invite them to partner with students and schools toward academic success, and work with them on advocating for their children's educational interests.*

It is well understood that all parents want what is best for their children. Equally clear, however, is the fact that not all parents have the knowledge and/or capacity to champion effectively their children's interests. DCPS' charge is to provide parents with the resources, tools and information they need to partner with their students and schools for academic success.

DCPS recognizes that to realize these goals, it has a responsibility to respect and communicate with parents, and that ongoing advice and counsel from a range of parents is necessary in order to plan well and execute successfully. In addition to the actions listed below, the Office of Family and Public Engagement will meet routinely with informal groups of parent advisors, beginning in spring 2009. These parents are drawn from across the city and will rotate so that a large number of parents can be heard.

In addition, DCPS recognizes that its schools must be transformed into welcoming environments that encourage the full and active participation of parents. To this end, DCPS will establish a high degree of accountability for teachers and principals to establish and maintain sound practices for parent communication and involvement. The Effective Schools Framework and the Teaching and Learning Framework are

blueprints for excellent schools and excellent instruction in every DCPS school; meaningful involvement with parents and community is an essential element in both of these frameworks. Performance metrics for teachers and principals will include effective parent communication methods and satisfaction levels.

While it is the shared responsibility of all DCPS departments to support parental involvement, the Office of Family and Public Engagement is a key driver of these efforts.

1. *Conduct community meetings/hearings/listening and information sessions for parents and community members*

Community meetings of various types and in a range of locations are a means by which DCPS provides information to, and receives input from, families and other community members. It is vital that the lines of communication operate in both directions, in face-to-face meetings of various sizes and formats, in online forums, through polls and other surveys, and more. The Chancellor's Community Forum Series provides monthly meetings at which a range of topics are set forth for community discussion and input; many of these topics have been suggested by members of the community. All agendas and notes are posted on the DCPS website, and community members are invited to share input through that means as well. Additional meetings large and small—in school auditoriums, in living rooms, and at PRCs across the city—take place as they are needed and/or requested. The planning process for the new Eastern High School, for example, includes two community working groups with a full complement of monthly meetings, as well as quarterly reporting out sessions with the larger community. All agendas, notes, and outcomes are posted on the web, and further input is invited through web posting.

Critical to the success of these events is thoughtfully planning them to foster exchange that is meaningful and useful to all participants.

2. *Enhance and expand the services of stand-alone Parent Resource Centers and school-based resource centers.*

DCPS currently operates three Parent Resource Centers (PRCs), which opened in summer 2008. PRCs are intended to serve as “one-stop shops” for parents, offering critical information about how DCPS operates, curriculum and standards, assessments and how to engage effectively with schools, as well as providing a space for parents to meet and receive services and programs. The PRCs currently partner with community-based organizations to offer adult literacy programs, computer-skills training, and GED classes. Community meetings take place there, and in the absence of an organized program, parents stop by to find information on topics such as school performance report cards, graduation requirements, or applications for out-of-boundary enrollment. These activities are monitored and evaluated for their reach and effectiveness. The work of the Centers will continue to evolve—both at schools and in the Centers themselves—in order to serve parents as well as parent coordinators, ensuring that parents are consistently provided with motivation, materials, and practice in serving as their children's

advocates and learning partners. In addition, DCPS also will partner with other district government agencies such as the Department of Mental Health, Parks and Recreation and Employment Services to provide necessary information and resources to parents.

3. *Develop and codify the role of parent coordinators and expand their numbers within schools.*

A recently completed audit of all DCPS schools provides the baseline information necessary to undertake this work. Evidently for the first time, we have foundational information on parental infrastructure in each school: the presence of a parent organization, coordinator, in-school resource center. A key ingredient necessary for effective parental engagement is the availability of well-trained and properly supported parent coordinators within the schools. Parent coordinators can perform an important function by addressing school-family issues, identifying resources and resolving individual questions and problems. We will work to develop a consistent role for coordinators across the system and to ensure that all schools are served by a parent coordinator. Principals, parent coordinators, and parents will collaborate in implementing meaningful best practices that enhance parental involvement and therefore the success of our schools.

The parent coordinators also can play a proactive role. Parent coordinators can serve as the primary means through which DCPS mobilizes parents to advocate for positive educational change.

4. *Through the network and resources of PRCs and parent coordinators, identify and make available a series of learning, problem-solving, and information sessions for parents, parent coordinators, and community.*

This framework will serve as the foundation of DCPS parental involvement, and, ideally, the basis of a parent academy—executed in collaboration with other community-based organizations committed to parental engagement—and available to parents across the city.

This comprehensive outreach and education initiative will be charted on a research- and practice-based framework that focuses on six major elements essential to successful parental involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community.

5. *Provide information for creation of NCLB-required Parental Involvement Policies (PIP).*

The federal government requires districts that receive Title I funds to create, jointly with parents in that district, a PIP that details how the district will:

- (a) *Involve parents in developing district school improvement plans.*
- (b) *Offer technical assistance and coordination to help schools plan parent involvement activities to improve student and school academic performance.*
- (c) *Build school and parent capacities for strong parent involvement.*



- (d) *Coordinate and integrate parent involvement strategies with other programs, such as Head Start, Reading First, Early Reading First, Even Start, Parents as Teachers, Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters, and limited English proficiency programs.*
  - (e) *Annually evaluate with parents the effectiveness of the policy in academically improving district schools.* The evaluation must include identification of barriers to parent involvement, especially barriers to parents who are economically disadvantaged, disabled, have limited English proficiency, have limited literacy, or belong to a racial or ethnic minority.
6. *Reinstitute DC STARS reporting and Implement Parent Assistant Module for DC-STARS.*

DC-STARS was originally implemented in 2005 and was intended, among other purposes, to provide reports on student achievement (using metrics like grades, attendance, drop-outs, and test scores). However, there were problems with its implementation that prevented it from being fully functional. The new incarnation of DC-STARS, with those problems fixed, can form the foundation of the IT required to make performance data available to parents. Much of this work is detailed in the Data-Driven Decisions plan; in addition to the IT work, DCPS will seek to create training for parents (offered through PRCs, for example) to help them learn how to interpret reports. As noted above, providing parents with online access to this system will allow them to stay informed about the ongoing performance of their child. In addition, providing parents with information about each school will allow them to make informed decisions about which school to place their child in and have a better understanding of the school's performance relative to others.

C. *Extend our reach into the community.*

The initiatives and efforts outlined above are guided by the simple idea that DCPS, at the central office and school level, must provide parents with a clear understanding of what a quality education looks like. DCPS believes that if it effectively arms parents with knowledge and tools related to a quality education for their child, they will demand action and accountability. Through the coordination of community meetings and hearings on issues and matters relevant to our students and our schools, the provision of the information and education initiatives outlined above, the creation of meaningful opportunities for parents and community members to participate in the revitalization of school-based parental advocacy organizations, we will involve and empower parents in our efforts to advance widespread improvement of D.C. public schools. In five years, we expect parents to be among the most well-informed and powerful change agents in the city, advocating for the success of our children and our schools.

- 1. *Create a database of parents, school leaders, community members and community organizations to facilitate dissemination of information & solicitation of input.*

As the other initiatives in this focus area are pursued, the Offices of Family and Public Engagement and Community Partnerships will keep track of parents, educators and community leaders who are actively involved in promoting the success of the district. This database, developed in collaboration with OCTO, will be a web-based tool that is capable of tracking and sorting parents across multiple characteristics and interests. If appropriate, this database can be worked into the Data-Driven Decisions plan for a broader IT infrastructure as a more formalized resource that staff members across DCPS can access.

2. *Publish and make available relevant school-, DCPS- and learning-focused information and resources for parents and community.*

This initiative represents continuing efforts aimed at creating multiple ways to offer well-crafted information to parents that is written in language that is understandable and clear, in English as well as translated into Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Amharic, and French. The Chancellor's Notes are only one example of what is possible—an online newsletter published every two weeks, each issue exploring a relevant aspect of school reform. Beginning in July 2008 with a distribution of 350, the Notes now go to 3600 subscribers. Input from readers has resulted in enhancements in format and subject matter. We anticipate that both feedback and circulation will continue to grow. Further media will include other communication on paper, online, and, when possible, on audio and video as well as more DCPS newsletters, a new DCPS website, and other offerings that are advisable as we continue to listen to the community and evaluate our effectiveness. Another key component of the communication effort is the identification of community-based organizations, non-profits, other government agencies, and private entities that serve our parents, and using those organizations as communications outlets for the dissemination – through whatever tools and vehicles such organizations have available – of DCPS-provided news and information. DCPS has already initiated this work and is compiling a database of such outlets. It is a priority to provide clear information on major transformation issues in addition to day-to-day information on how schools are running.

D. *Pursue partnerships with businesses and community organizations*

Community organizations and nonprofits bring passion, resources and specialty programs to public schools. We will open the door for these groups as well as the business community to play a role in the ongoing effort to expand educational options for all students. We will look for ways to integrate the excelling groups and give them an opportunity to grow their programs and initiatives to scale. The Office of Community Partnerships (OCP) will match schools with partnership opportunities and maximize the impact that partners make on student achievement.

Currently, partnerships are:

- ¶ Not cataloged by DCPS
- ¶ Liable to be concentrated in certain areas or schools
- ¶ Unaware of the proper policies or protocols governing school partnerships

- ¶ Not always providing activities aligned with the needs of the district

The Office of Community Partnerships has begun the work to address these and other issues.

1. *Identify partners and match schools with partnership opportunities in a way that maximizes the impact that partners achieve on the overall goals of the district.*

A principal challenge to the effective operation of OCP is the lack of a centralized directory of all of the partners that work in DCPS schools. Early this Spring, OCP worked collaboratively with school staff and community-based organizations to “map” or identify all DCPS partners and the schools they serve. That initiative now complete, DCPS has the information necessary to identify gaps in services and implement ways to deploy and utilize partners more effectively in under-served schools across the District.

2. *Organize partners into collaborative groups with a lead partner for each group.*

DCPS will use a “hub” model to coordinate the numerous partners throughout the district. For example, currently the DC Arts and Humanities collaborative, a private 501(c)(3), works to coordinate almost all arts activity in the schools. DCPS would like to establish similar “hubs” for other types of organizations, such as business, international interests, and Out of School Time programming. These hubs would help organizations distribute themselves across schools, would facilitate contact with school administration, and would in some cases provide the supplemental funding schools need in order to take advantage of partnership offers (e.g., the transportation needed to take advantage of free theater tickets).

3. *Manage the processing and participation of volunteers.*

The current volunteer process is cumbersome and time intensive. Paper-based, it requires prospective volunteers to travel to DCPS to submit the application for processing. DCPS is collaborating with Serve DC and Greater DC Cares to create an online portal that will create a more user-friendly process that also will allow candidates to explore a menu of existing volunteer opportunities; our current system requires a labor-intensive individual matching of candidates to available opportunities.

4. *Implement measurement systems for existing and new partnerships*

Currently there are numerous external partners working to raise student achievement in our schools. However, there is currently no clear system to measure whether their work is linked to student achievement. When a school improves or declines in a year-long period, we have no quantifiable way of understanding the impact of the resources provided by our external partners. We will create a system that measures the effect of these additional resources, and use that data to build upon the work of successful partners, and end relationships with ineffective partners.

## APPENDIX: Summaries by Focus Area

### OVERARCHING

Ultimately we are trying to achieve two things:

1. Build the highest-performing urban school district in the country.
2. Close the achievement gap that persists along racial and socio-economic lines.

To measure our progress toward those overarching goals, we are proposing the following system-wide student achievement outcome measures:

- ¶ District-wide and school level proficiency rates on DC-CAS in reading and math
- ¶ Achievement gap on DC-CAS
- ¶ High school graduation rate
- ¶ Enrollment in college and 5-year college graduation rates

Within each of the Focus Areas, we have proposed a focused set of metrics to track our progress. In our Annual Performance Plan, we set targets for specific “Key Performance Indicators” for that year, given the shorter term priorities for that cycle. The following table defines the “end state” we are striving for in each focus area, along with the major workstreams that will get us there, and the ways we will measure our success.

END STATE	MAJOR WORKSTREAMS [AND OWNERS]	KEY MEASURES OF SUCCESS
<b>Focus Area: COMPELLING SCHOOLS</b>		
<p><b>Create schools that provide a consistent foundation in academics, strong support for social/emotional needs and a variety of challenging themes and programs.</b> By 2013, we will offer a diverse portfolio of high-performing schools that serve the needs of all of our students and attract families with a variety of compelling programs. To deploy more resources directly to classrooms where they can make a difference, we will close under-enrolled schools. Chronically failing schools will be dramatically improved through a variety of interventions, and all schools will offer a full complement of academic and enrichment programs and wrap-around services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance the quality of our school portfolio (Office of Schools, Office of Portfolio Management)</li> <li>• Ensure accountability for school performance (Office of Data and Accountability)</li> <li>• Make school environments safe, modern, and conducive to learning (Office of Youth Engagement, Office of School Security)</li> <li>• Expand our ability to meet special-education and English language learner needs (Office of Special Education, Office of Bilingual Education)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student enrollment</li> <li>• Ward-level accessibility to a diverse range of programs</li> <li>• Teacher, parent and student assessments of school conditions (safety, culture and climate, facilities)</li> <li>• State-reportable incidents/disciplinary actions</li> <li>• Spending on special education private placements</li> <li>• Number of schools demonstrating positive gains on DC-CAS</li> </ul>
<b>Focus Area: GREAT PEOPLE</b>		
<p><b>Develop and retain the most highly effective educators in the country, and recognize and reward them for their work.</b> We will build a system that identifies, hires, develops, and rewards the many passionate and talented people in the system, and that holds every school employee accountable for performing his/her duties competently.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dramatically improve teacher recruitment, professional development, and compensation (Human Resources; Office of Professional Development)</li> <li>• Dramatically improve principal recruitment, professional development, and compensation (Human Resources; Office of Professional Development)</li> <li>• Dramatically improve central office staff recruitment, professional development and compensation (Human Resources)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher, principal and central office/administrator application and selectivity rates</li> <li>• Teacher, principal and central office/administrator unplanned attrition rates</li> <li>• Unfilled positions on day 1 of school</li> <li>• Qualitative assessments of teachers and principals</li> </ul>

Focus Area: ALIGNED CURRICULUM		
<p><b>Implement a rigorous, relevant, college preparatory curriculum that gives all students meaningful options for life.</b> DCPS will take seriously its responsibility to help students build the basic skills that form the foundation for productive lives, and to challenge every student to achieve to his or her full potential. Going forward, we will align our curriculum, instructional materials and approach, use of data, and professional development toward clear, ambitious goals. Everyone in the system, including teachers, students, and parents, will know what those goals are and what their role is in helping us reach them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create tools to translate the content standards into standards-based instruction that is focused and captures the high expectations DCPS has for its students [Office of Chief Academic Officer]</li> <li>• Refine formative student assessments so that they map directly to the standards and provide effective diagnostic and formative data</li> <li>• Use data to inform instruction, in part by using benchmark assessments and short-cycle assessments that teachers can use to continuously improve their teaching practices [Office of Data and Accountability,]</li> <li>• Create professional development programs that support teachers in effective planning, deliver, and assessment standards-based instruction the development of professional learning communities [Office of Professional Development]</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DIBELS reading assessment scores (K-3)</li> <li>• Students taking AP or IB courses</li> <li>• Student test scores on AP and IB exams</li> <li>• Surveys of teachers on quality of school level coaching</li> </ul>
Focus Area: DATA-DRIVEN DECISIONS		
<p><b>Support decision-making with accurate information about how our students are performing and how the district as a whole is performing.</b> DCPS will actively use data on student performance to determine whether our students are learning and how best to help them. We will create a data culture supported by dramatically upgraded data collection and analysis, and we will use facts about student achievement in making decisions about where to put our resources and how to manage our staff.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design and implement a coherent, clear accountability system [Office of Data and Accountability]</li> <li>• Place high-quality information at the fingertips of the DCPS community [Office of Data and Accountability]</li> <li>• Provide supports to transform data into actionable information [Office of Teaching and Learning, Office of Professional Development]</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schools maintaining and reporting high quality, electronic student information (grades, attendance)</li> <li>• Percent of teachers who are regular users of online student information systems, including DC-BAS</li> <li>• Number of parents using parent module of DC STARS (student information system)</li> </ul>

Focus Area: EFFECTIVE CENTRAL OFFICE		
<p><b>Central office functions – provide schools with support they need to operate effectively.</b> Too often the central office has operated as though schools were there to serve it, rather than the other way around. Moving forward, the central office will deliver on its sole duty of efficiently providing schools with the services they need to operate, and teachers and students will be able to devote their time and energy to teaching and learning – the things that truly matter.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve efficiency and reduce costs in procurement [Office of Contracts and Acquisitions, Office of the Chief Financial Officer]</li> <li>• Enhance the efficiency of Food Service and the quality of meals [Food Service]</li> <li>• Bring more discipline and structure to financial planning [Office of the Chief Financial Officer]</li> <li>• Develop aligned strategic planning, performance management, and project management systems for measuring and ensuring success of transformation initiatives [Office of Transformation Management]</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % of schools with all textbooks and supplies on day 1</li> <li>• Procurement customer satisfaction survey</li> <li>• Timeframes for completing small and large purchases</li> <li>• FARM application submission</li> <li>• Food service customer satisfaction surveys</li> <li>• Timeliness of budget submissions</li> <li>• Transparency and equity of school level funding</li> </ul>
Focus Area: ENGAGED COMMUNITY		
<p><b>Partner with families and community members who demand better schools.</b> We will clarify the shared responsibility of parents, students, and the community in increasing student achievement, and we will enhance our efforts to engage important stakeholders in making our schools successful.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase student engagement in their academic success,</li> <li>• Share information with parents, invite them to partner with students and schools toward academic success, and work with them on advocating for their children’s educational interests</li> <li>• Extend our reach into the community</li> <li>• Pursue partnerships with businesses and community organizations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent and partner satisfaction surveys</li> <li>• Parent-teacher conference attendance</li> <li>• Usage of website by parents</li> <li>• Surveys of parent/student understanding of key academic information</li> </ul>